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THE GOND AND BHUMIA OF  
EASTERN MANDLA





Musra, one of the author's  
main Bhumia informants



# THE GOND AND BHUMIA OF EASTERN MANDLA

by  
STEPHEN FUCHS.

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## P R E F A C E

Nowadays many anthropologists regard the writing of monographs like the present one as something out of date. They believe that no single ethnographer can do justice to all aspects of a tribe's culture and describe them all adequately. This may be true. Like other sciences anthropology has also developed and expanded to such a degree that no one can be an expert in all its departments. But, on the other hand, an adequate treatment of all aspects of a tribe's culture would require a whole team of field workers. Such a team is scarcely ever available and, for all practical purposes, it would probably not get very far in its research. The best observer is still the lonely field worker who has gained the confidence of the subjects of his study and who refrains from disturbing the routine life of the settlements which he visits for longer or shorter time. Still better, if he understands their language sufficiently well that he can dispense with an interpreter. He should also stay long enough among the people to observe personally the customs and rites which he is anxious to describe. Even then a mere observation, however close and exact, is not sufficient. The field worker should also have well-informed and intelligent interpreters of the meaning and purpose of these rites and customs.

While I was able to fulfil most of the desiderata just expressed, I was unfortunately not able to stay long enough among the Bhumia and Gond of eastern Mandla to witness all their customs and rites personally. But I had very intelligent informants, well-versed in Bhumia and Gond lore, who would describe these customs fully and minutely and interpret them adequately.

The main part of my research among the Bhumia was done in 1945 when I stayed for about six months mainly at Dullapur near Dindori, and it was more or less completed on a second visit in 1947 at Dhanora near Bhirsingpur. Of course, I also



visited other places of the region where the Bhumia are at home and stayed in several of their villages to gain a more general idea of the tribe. Another visit to nearly the same places in 1951 enabled me, in somewhat shorter time, to collect all data on the Gond living in a close symbiosis with the Bhumia.

My main Bhumia informants were Panga of Bijora, an elderly and wise man, and Musra, of the same village, well-versed in Baiga mythology and religious practices, being himself a *dewar* (village priest) and the son of a *dewar*. My main Gond informants were Dhuri (a *gunia*) and Bhagal of Bijora. Others too gave me much valuable information, but it is not possible to mention them all by name. I am grateful for their help.

In my research I received much valuable assistance from Catholic missionaries working in eastern Mandla, particularly from Rev. J. van Heertum O. Praem and Rev. Joseph Thaliath. They introduced me to the right men who could and would give me all the information I wanted and helped me also in many other ways. My sincere thanks are due to them.

In studying the Bhumia and Gond of eastern Mandla, I had in mind not only to describe fully their whole cultural life, but also to show how the cultures of these two tribes are inter-related and how this mutual giving and taking works in all phases of life. I have also tried to point out the many cases when Bhumia as well as Gond have borrowed from Hindu culture and religion, without however losing completely their tribal identity. The interlay of so many cultural influences active in the past as also at present, may make the culture of the tribes in eastern Mandla very complex and confusing. This appears particularly striking in their social organisation and in their religion. It explains also a number of inconsistencies and obvious contradictions. If man all over the world is "a bundle of contradictions", the Bhumia and Gond of eastern Mandla certainly make no exception from this rule.

The detailed description of many rites may to some readers appear unnecessary and pedestrian. But I believe that some of these details have great significance on the problem of inter-



tribal connections, and on the problem of the extent of Hindu influence on their concepts and usages. A scientific study of this type should therefore not suppress these details to make the book more readable.

Other critics may deem the monograph superfluous, for Dr. Verrier Elwin had already in 1939 published a monograph on the Baiga. However, Elwin studied the Baiga in a different area of Mandla District; moreover, as even a perfunctory reading will reveal, his study lays the emphasis on different aspects of Baiga life. His work, besides, ignores almost entirely the Gond with whom the Bhumia are so closely connected. Thus my book is no repetition of Elwin's monograph nor does it supersede it; it only complements and, in some points, corrects it.

I am deeply indebted to His Excellency, the Apostolic Internuncio Archbishop J. Knox, and Dr. W. Koppers SVD, Professor Emeritus of Vienna University and former head of Völkerkundliches Institut der Universität Wien, without whose generous help the publication of this monograph would not have been possible.

I must also thank Prof. Koppers and Fr. van Kroonenburg O. Praem. for several photos, Mr. J. V. Ferreira, Rev. Kevin O'Toole SVD and Rev. L. N. Serkis S.J. for their painstaking revision of the text.

*Bombay, October 1959*

STEPHEN FUCHS





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## INTRODUCTION





## CHAPTER I

### THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE BHUMIA AND GOND

#### 1. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE BHUMIA

DESPITE the comparatively exact decennial Census Reports of India, it is impossible to give the definite figures of population with regard to the Baiga in general, and their Bhumia sub-group in particular. There are various reasons for this: one is that the different sub-groups of the Baiga go under various names, and it is not always clear whether a certain sub-group is included in the Baiga tribe or not. It may be included in one area, and returned as a separate caste in another. Several tribal groups which racially belong to the Baiga tribe are ignorant of this connection or do not want to be reminded of it. In Dindori *tahsil* of Mandla District, for instance, the Bhumia, who racially are certainly Baiga, do not want to be called by that name but prefer the designation 'Bhumia' or 'Dewar'. Further, the name 'Baiga' signifies not only a tribe, but also a profession, namely that of a village priest, or sorcerer. A 'Baiga' by profession might be a Gond or a member of another caste, but in the Census Report he is very likely returned as 'Baiga'.

I give here the figures of the Census Report of 1941 for the Central Provinces (now Madhya Pradesh) and Berar<sup>1</sup>, for what they are worth:

DISTRICT	BAIGA		TOTAL
	HINDU	TRIBAL	
C.P. and Berar	10.651	21.507	32.158
Jabalpur Division	5.972	17.864	23.836
Jabalpur District	1.038	2.170	3.208
Mandla District	4.934	15.694	20.628

<sup>1</sup> Private Communication from the Under-Secretary to the Government, C.P. and Berar, of 17 December, 1945.

DISTRICT	BAIGA		TOTAL
	HINDU	TRIBAL	
Nagpur Division	208	360	568
Chhindwara District	208	360	568
Chhattisgarh Division	4,471	3,283	7,754
Bhandara District	102	..	102
Balaghat District	2,640	3,279	5,919
Bilaspur District	1,705	..	1,705
Drug District	24	4	28

The other districts of the Central Provinces and Berar did not return any Baiga.

But in addition to the 32,158 Baiga in the Central Provinces, if the figures are correct, the Census also returns several thousand Baiga from the former native states in the north, east and south of eastern Mandla: In 1941 they numbered 5,611<sup>2</sup> in the States now incorporated in Madhya Pradesh, and 51,423 in former Rewa State<sup>3</sup> and 158 in the former Hyderabad State.

The Baiga tribe is sub-divided into the following sections: the Bhumia, Bharotia, Binjhar, Muria, Narotia or Nahar, Bharia, Kurka, Bhaina (Rai- and Kath-Bhaina), Kondwan or Kundi, and Gondwaina.<sup>4</sup> There are no statistics available as to the relative strength of these sub-sections, but it appears that the Bhumia, Binjhar and Bharotia are numerically strongest and number between seven and eight thousand individuals each. It is possible that the Nahal (or Nahar)—in the Census Report returned as a separate caste—also belong to the Baiga tribe. V. Elwin mentions the Nahar of Balaghat District<sup>5</sup> and those living in Baihar<sup>6</sup> as Baiga. But more Nahal live in close economic symbiosis with the Gond and Korku in the western districts of Madhya Pradesh and with the Bhil and Bhilala in the Nimar Pargana of the adjoining former Holkar State (later Madhya Bharat, now also Madhya Pradesh). For Madhya Pradesh, no separate figures of the Nahal were

<sup>2</sup> The *Census of India, 1941*, gives no figures for the different States; in 1931, the *Census of India* gave the following figures: Korea State, 108 Baiga; Udaipur, 97; Changbhakar, 162; Raigarh, 791; Kawardha, 3074; Kanker, 420; Bastar, 397—a total of 4,849 Baiga.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. V. Thakkar (1950): pp. 252, 256.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. V. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> V. Elwin (1939): p. 524.

<sup>6</sup> V. Elwin (1939): p. 7.



returned since 1911, when they numbered 12,403. The 1941 Census Report of Holkar State returned for the two *parganas* of Nimar and Nemawar 12,189 Nahal.<sup>7</sup> Though as far as their material culture is concerned, the Nahal appear to be akin to the Baiga, and thus would fit well into the role of the westernmost sub-group of the tribe, the anthropological measurements which W. Koppers took of the Baiga and Nahal show some differences in their racial constitution.<sup>8</sup>

But these differences may be due to frequent intermarriage of the Baiga with the Gond, and of the Nahal with the Korku and Bhil. In any case, the difference in the racial constitution is not so considerable as to exclude altogether a common racial origin. If further research could really prove the racial identity of the Baiga and Nahal, the question about the original language of the Baiga would also be solved. For, in a few villages in southern Madhya Pradesh, the original Nahali language is still spoken by the Nahals.<sup>9</sup>

It appears doubtful to me, on the other hand, that the Bhaina are really a sub-group of the Baiga. They are pronounced totemists while totemism is almost unknown among the other Baiga sub-sections.<sup>10</sup> But it is possible that the totemism of the Bhaina is a result of their close connection and frequent intermarriage with the Kavar, a primitive totemistic tribe of eastern Madhya Pradesh.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. VARIATION IN BAIGA POPULATION

Though the Census Reports gave the total figures of the Baiga population since 1881 for every tenth year, the obvious irregularity of the returns does not allow us to draw any definite conclusions as to the fluctuation of the Baiga population. The figures in the early Census Reports are almost certainly incorrect, for at that time the Baiga proved very

<sup>7</sup> *Holkar State Census Report*, 1941, p. 164.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. M. Weninger (1952).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 12, Part 1, p. 310. Nihali was spoken in 1931 by 1,196 persons; in 1951 by 756 persons. [*Census of India*, 1951: Languages, Part 1, p. 15. Cf. also: S. Bhattacharya (1957) p. 245.]

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, p. 228.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, pp. 393 f.

elusive when the Census was taken and could not easily be enumerated. There was, further, no uniformity in enumeration, since it was not clear which sub-groups really belonged to the Baiga tribe. Thus some sub-groups were enumerated one year as Baiga, another year as separate tribes, resp. castes. Conclusions can safely be drawn only from the last two Census Reports of the Central Provinces (Madhya Pradesh); they show that there the number of the Baiga has remained almost stationary. It was 37,086 in 1931 and 37,969 in 1941. I think that this statement is correct; the birth-rate of the Baiga appears to be low while infant mortality is high.

In spite of their general unreliability I now give the figures of the Census Reports: the Census Report of 1881 returned 38,883 Baiga for the whole of India; 21,336 in 1891; 24,743 in 1901; 30,391 in 1911; 57,314 in 1921; 72,899 in 1931; 89,392 in 1941.<sup>12</sup> The high increase of Baiga in 1921 and 1931 is due to the fact that in 1921 Baiga were returned for the first time from Central India. While in the Central Provinces (Madhya Pradesh) the number of Baiga increased only slightly, it rose in Central India (Madhya Bharat) from 29,736 in 1921 to 35,813 in 1931 and jumped to 51,423 in 1941. This sudden increase is inexplicable; it is certainly due to a different method of enumeration.

Of the whole Baiga tribe whose geographical and numerical distribution we have just given, we shall consider in future only the Bhumia sub-section. The Bhumia, one of the most important divisions of the Baiga tribe, live in a compact group in Dindori *tahsil* (sub-district) of Mandla District and in the adjoining (former) Rewa State. From Dindori some Bhumia have emigrated to Niwas *tahsil* in the west, and to the former Kawardha State and Pandaria in the south.

### 3. THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE GOND

What has just been said about the inaccuracy of the Census Reports with regard to the enumeration of the Baiga, is equally true for the enumeration of the Gond. They, too, are returned

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 538; and A. V. Thakkar (1950): Part 1, pp. 252 and 256.



under various names as separate tribes or castes, while on the other hand some tribes are being enumerated as Gond which racially have no connection with them. And since the Gond are so much more numerous than the Baiga, the inaccuracy is also the greater.

Since figures are not available for the Census of 1951, we have to fall back on the Census of 1941 for details about the distribution of the Gond over India. The number of Gond in the whole of India in 1941 was 3,201,004 against 3,063,753 in 1931. The proportion of distribution over the various provinces was in 1941 as follows:<sup>13</sup>

Bihar: 26,931 (?)\*

Orissa: 312,364 (255,745 inclusively Bihar)

C.P. and Berar (Madhya Pradesh): 2,488,442 (2,261,138)

United Provinces: 124,095 (121,579)

Hyderabad: 142,026 (113,280)

Bombay: 1,030 (562)

Madras: 495 (29,052)

Central India (Madhya Bharat): 292,755 (282,397)

Bengal: 12,866 (-)

\* *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 542; A. V. Thakkar (1950): p. 256.

This list clearly shows that more than two thirds of the Gond tribe reside in Madhya Pradesh (the former Central Provinces). The distribution in the different districts of the Central Provinces was not available for 1941. I give, therefore, the figures of 1931:

Central Provinces without Berar 1,891,835<sup>14</sup>

Saugor	District	30,749	Damoh	District	27,364
Jabalpur	"	94,083	Mandla	"	219,136
Seoni	"	135,931	Narsinghpur	"	42,245
Hoshangabad	"	48,621	Nimar	"	10,411
Betul	"	111,602	Chhindwara	"	176,808
Wardha	"	43,195	Nagpur	"	53,002
Chanda	"	95,358	Bhandara	"	78,289
Balaghat	"	102,019	Raipur	"	239,276
Bilaspur	"	172,361	Drug	"	115,632

<sup>13</sup> For comparison the figures of 1931 are given following in brackets.

<sup>14</sup> *Census of India*, 1931. Vol. XII, Part II, pp. 424-6.

It is important to note that in all the tracts which are inhabited by the Baiga, the population is overwhelmingly Gondish. In all the districts where we find the Baiga they are outnumbered by the Gond. And the Baiga are the more completely reduced to an insignificant minority, as they do not live in a compact group, but everywhere in close proximity with Gond. In every village where we find a Baiga settlement, there is also a Gond settlement (usually bigger and more prosperous). To be sure, the two tribes live in separate hamlets, but they form one village and there is much inter-communication between the two communities. The numerical preponderance of the Gond, coupled with greater wealth and higher social prestige, naturally led to a high degree of economic and cultural dependency of the Baiga on the Gond.

In the following register, I give the corresponding numbers of Baiga and Gond in a few selected districts and sub-districts (*tahsil* or *talug*) of the Baiga tracts. The statistics are for 1931.<sup>15</sup>

TAHSIL OR TALUQ				NO. OF BAIGA	NO. OF GOND
Jabalpur	..	..	..	2,305	39,345
Mandla	..	..	..	7,193	82,522
Dindori	..	..	..	7,186	68,486
Niwas	..	..	..	5,559	68,128
Lakhnadon	..	..	..	484	62,981
Balaghat	..	..	..	762	20,149
Baihar	..	..	..	4,877	48,510
Bilaspur	..	..	..	1,028	83,768
Janjgir	..	..	..	749	23,490

#### 4. VARIATION OF GOND POPULATION

The general inaccuracy of the Census Reports in the enumeration of the elusive jungle tribes extends also to the Gond. For the same reasons for which an exact account of the increase or decrease of the Baiga population is impossible, it is impossible to assess the growth or decline of the Gond population. Nevertheless, in the following list the figures of the

<sup>15</sup> *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. XII, Part II, pp. 456 and 457.



Census are given for what they are worth: The number of Gond was 1,542,921 in 1881; 2,000,124 in 1891; 1,958,806 in 1901. 2,827,758 in 1911; 2,837,577 in 1921; 3,063,753 in 1931;<sup>16</sup> 3,201,004 in 1941.<sup>17</sup> The value of these statistics is doubtful if we bear in mind that up to the year 1911 the figures are incomplete: Bihar and Orissa, Central India and Hyderabad returned Gond for the first time in 1911. From 1901 to 1921, the figures for Maria, Muria, Bhattra and Parja were included in the Gond category; later these tribes were treated as separate tribes.

For the last thirty years, ever since complete figures of the Gond tribe have been available, the Gond population shows a steady increase. While the percentage of increase for the whole Gond population from 1921 to 1931 was 8.54 per cent,<sup>18</sup> a figure well below the national increase rate of 10.5 per cent,<sup>19</sup> the Central Provinces reported an increase of 10.3 per cent,<sup>20</sup> and Mandla District even 18.7 per cent.<sup>21</sup> This rather disproportionate increase may be a result of more exact enumeration in recent years, or of immigration, or of other unaccountable factors. For it is not likely that the natural growth of the Gond population should exceed the national rate of increase. This is borne out by the rate of increase of the Gond population from 1931 to 1941: the percentage was 4.51.

## 5. RACIAL ORIGIN OF THE BHUMIA-BAIGA AND GOND

### (a) *Of the Bhumia-Baiga*

According to their own beliefs, the Bhumia are the oldest settlers in their present habitat. This fact is recognized also by the other tribes and castes of eastern Mandla who sometimes call the Bhumia *malguzar*, i.e. owners of the land. One of my informants, Panga of Bijora, said that they are called

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 542.

<sup>17</sup> A. V. Thakkar (1950): Part 1, p. 256.

<sup>18</sup> According to my calculation, the percentage is 7.97 only. But the *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 542, has 8.54.

<sup>19</sup> *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 12, Part 2, p. 424.

<sup>21</sup> *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 12, Part 2, p. 424.

'Bhumia', sons of the soil, because originally the whole land belonged to them. Musra of Bijora, another of my informants, maintained that the Bhumia had the first right to the land. He said that they were the first kings of the country. In the *bidri* ceremony, at the beginning of the sowing season, the officiating priest, always a Baiga, is addressed as Baiga Raja (King Baiga).

About the past history of the Bhumia, we have no definite information. Their own traditions cannot claim any historical value. The earliest reliable account of the Baiga is no older than eighty years. Whence they came, how they reached their present habitat, when they settled there, is completely unknown. At present we have to fall back on vague conjectures if we want to place them anywhere in the racial and cultural history of India.

Certain elements of their material culture, like the use of the bamboo-plaited rain hood, the manner in which their women arrange their loincloth, their social organization, the name of their chief god, and other points, would suggest that the Bhumia-Baiga came from the east. This would tally well with the assumption of Russell and Hiralal<sup>22</sup> that the Baiga are an offshoot of the important Bhuiya tribe which numbers more than half a million in Bihar and Bengal. With the Bhuiya of Bihar, the Bhumia-Baiga are geographically connected through the former Rewa State where they are still numerous and from where, according to their own traditions, they later immigrated into Mandla District. However, for lack of anthropometric data this connection cannot yet be proved.

Russell, on another page of his work,<sup>23</sup> calls the Baiga a primitive Dravidian tribe, but it is obvious that this does not mean anything. For on page 308 of the same volume he states that the Bhuiya (of whom the Baiga are supposed to be an offshoot) are a Munda or Kolarian tribe. That would, of course, only mean that they formerly used a Munda language, an assumption which is not proved. Their racial origin is a further unsolved problem. For no Bhuiya and very few Baiga have ever been studied by physical anthropologists. More-

<sup>22</sup> R. V. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, pp. 310 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, p. 77.



over, it is quite uncertain whether the Munda-speaking tribes in eastern Central India are racially distinct from the Dravida-speaking tribes. The tribes which now use an Aryan dialect in this part of India and claim generally and consistently to be the older settlers may even belong to a pre-Mundarian and pre-Dravidian race.

If it is true that the Bhumia are physically not very different from the Gond and other tribes of the district, this may be due to the fact of frequent intermarriage with them. There can be no doubt that today the Bhumia are a racial mixture.

It would appear, in short, that the Bhumia are a jungle tribe of food-gatherers and semi-nomadic hoe-cultivators, with even less inclination for intensive field-cultivation than the Gond. The jungle tracts of Mandla District and of the adjoining (former) Rewa State seem to have been their home for centuries. If Russell and Hiralal are right in their assumption that the Gond incursion took place between the 9th and 13th centuries<sup>24</sup>, the Bhumia-Baiga, being much older settlers in Mandla District, must have been, before the Gond incursion, under the sway of the Rajput and Gaoli dynasties ruling in the district from the 6th to the 12th century. It may have been at that time that they adopted their Aryan speech and so many Hindu customs and beliefs.

What is remarkable is the absence of any traditions of great chiefs of their tribe. While in the Chhattisgarh plain and on the hill-ranges surrounding it a number of estates are held by landowners belonging to tribes related to the Bhumia, like the Bhaina and Binjhar,<sup>25</sup> the Bhumia have never held such estates. They probably roamed the forest in small family groups. Even now that they have settled in villages, their hamlets (*tola*) are generally small, consisting of a few family groups, often relatives who have built their homesteads close to each other.

#### (b) *Of the Gond*

The racial origin of the Gond is equally shrouded in mystery. The scanty anthropometric evidence available would suggest

<sup>24</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, pp. 506 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, p. 79.

that the racial features of the Gond are not distinctive enough to indicate to which racial group they belong.

The question from which part of India the Gond might have migrated into their present habitat may be answered by the fact that almost half of the Gond speak a Dravidian dialect.<sup>26</sup> With the Oraon and Khond, the Gond are the northernmost Dravidian-speaking tribes. Grierson<sup>27</sup> states that their language, Gondi, is more akin to Tamil and Kanarese than to Telugu. This would imply that the Gond formerly lived in the more central parts of southern India, in the neighbourhood of Kanarese and Tamil-speaking peoples. The traditions of both the Gond and Oraon, as well as cultural evidence, support the assumption that these tribes indeed lived at one time in southern India.<sup>28</sup> A connection with Kannada is supported by the fact that the Kanarese share a number of folklore elements with the Gond.<sup>29</sup> But there is also some evidence of a connection with Telugu-speaking peoples, for some gold coins have been found, issued by King Sangramasahi, the first great king of the Raj-Gond Dynasty of Garha-Mandla, which bear a Telugu legend. They date from the years 1513 and 1541 A.D.<sup>30</sup>

R. V. Russell and Hiralal<sup>31</sup> are of the opinion that it was between the 9th and 13th centuries A.D. that the Gond settled in Gondwana. For it is certain that Rajput dynasties were ruling in Jabalpur from the 6th to the 12th century, in Seoni about the 6th century and in Bhandak near Chanda from an early period as well as at Ratanpur in Chhattisgarh. From about the 12th century, these dynasties disappear and there is a blank till the 14th century or later, when Gond kingdoms are found established at Kharla in Betul, at Deogarh in Chhindwara, at Garha-Mandla including Jabalpur country, and at Chanda 14 miles from Bhandak. It seems clear that

<sup>26</sup> In 1931, 1,864,878 of the 3,063,763 Gond spoke Gondi, a Dravidian dialect; (Cf. *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 488); but in 1951 only 1,232,886. (Cf. *Census of India*, 1951: Languages, Part I, p. 8.)

<sup>27</sup> G. A. Grierson (1906): Vol. 4, p. 485.

<sup>28</sup> G. A. Grierson (1906): p. 406.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. I. Karve (1953): p. 21 f.

<sup>30</sup> V. W. Karambelkar (1953): p. 137 f.

<sup>31</sup> R. V. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, p. 506.



the Hindu dynasties were subverted by the Gond between the 12th and 14th centuries, after the Mohammedan invasions from northern India had weakened or destroyed the central powers of the Hindus and prevented any assistance being afforded to these outlying settlements.<sup>32</sup>

It goes without saying that a tribe spread over so vast an area could not preserve its racial, cultural and linguistic uniformity, the more so as in former times the Gond almost certainly freely admitted other tribal groups into their community. For we cannot assume that the Gond emigrated from their former habitat into Gondwana in their entire present strength.<sup>33</sup> It is more probable that they were a numerically limited, but culturally a somewhat superior tribe who assimilated some of the more primitive tribal people living in the jungles of Central India. Where the Gond appeared in more compact and numerically stronger groups—as in Mandla, Chanda and Betul districts—they were indeed able to implant their own language and certain customs and beliefs on the small, scattered tribal groups in the forests of Gondwana and to incorporate them entirely. But where the Gond settled in smaller numbers and encountered stronger communities of earlier settlers—as in eastern Mandla—they themselves abandoned their original Dravidian language and adopted the language as well as the customs of the jungle tribes like the Baiga and Ahir with whom they even formed marital alliances. Their tribal solidarity and their superior social prestige, however, prevented them from becoming wholly submerged in the older tribes of the country. On the contrary, the other tribes of Gondwana were anxious to be admitted into the Gond community since this enhanced their social status. Until very recently, the Gond freely admitted Baiga and Ahir girls into their community while they were always more reluctant to give their daughters to men of these tribes.

During the time when the Gond spread all over Gondwana

<sup>32</sup> It is, of course, possible that the Gond occupied Gondwana long before the 12th century, with the permission of the Rajput rulers. It was only after the 12th century that they felt strong enough to usurp ruling powers.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. C. von Furer-Haimendorf (1948): p. 1.

and gradually by reason of numerical strength acquired a leading position, they must also have come in close contact with the Rajputs and with agricultural castes like Kurmi and Kunbi, Lodhi and others. Though the Gond themselves may not have been averse to intermarriage with these castes, these non-tribals were barred by their caste rules from forming marital unions with the Gond on a large scale. It is, therefore, not likely that the racial substance of the Gond population was much modified by a mixture with these castes. Only some chiefs of the Gond were able to marry into a Rajput family.<sup>34</sup>

While a racial mixture of the Gond with the Rajput and other castes was thus effectively prevented, a vigorous cultural amalgamation was carried on in which the Gond were very much on the receiving side. And though the bulk of the Gond population refused to give up their Dravidian dialect, they readily adopted many customs and beliefs of the Rajputs and other castes of Central India. It is known, for instance, that the Gond kings of Garha-Mandla employed Brahmins from Benares as priests and poets. King Sangramasahi himself appears as a talented author of Sanskrit verses.<sup>35</sup> The result was that the religious, social and material culture of the Gond now forms a curious blend of many different and sometimes widely divergent cultural traits. But their racial stock was not perceptibly changed.

#### (c) *Anthropometric Analysis of the Gond and Bhumia in Eastern Mandla*

If the assumption is correct that the Gond of eastern Mandla have received in the past a good amount of Baiga and Ahir blood, this would show itself in anthropometric evidence. This is indeed so. For the impression that there is great somatic conformity between the Gond and Baiga-Bhumia of eastern Mandla is confirmed by the metrical and morphological analysis of measurements which W. Koppers took in 1939 of 85 Baiga-Bhumia (64 males and 21 females) and 75 Gond (49

<sup>34</sup> Thus the Gond Raja Dalpat Shah married the Rajput princess Durgavati of Mahoba.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. V. W. Karambelkar (1953): pp. 137-44.



males and 26 females) at Duhania near Bhirsingpur.<sup>36</sup>

Skin, hair and eyes show rich pigmentation. While hair and iris are fairly homogeneous and show only the darkest shades of colours met among mankind, the skin presents a much larger range of tints, from middle-brown to a fairly dark-brown colour. Lighter shades do not occur; neither do the darkest tints such as those found among African Negroes and Melanesians.

The form of the head-hair may be qualified as predominantly smooth to slightly wavy. Curly hair (i.e. curling from its very root) occurs in 24.5 per cent of Baiga males, 5 per cent of Baiga females, 16.1 per cent of Gond males and not at all among Gond females. The facial hair and body hair is rather scanty. Only old men seem to grow hair on the chest.

The shape of the head is particularly characteristic. Measurements and morphological features correspond. Variation between individuals is not large. According to the usual index-classes most of the male individuals are dolichocephalic. Among the Baiga-Bhumia, and even more so among the Gond, we find a great number of hyper-dolichocephalics (25.8 per cent Baiga-Bhumia and 42.9 per cent Gond). There are hardly any brachycephalics at all. This highly pronounced dolichocephaly is not caused so much by a special development of the head-length. Though in general among the Baiga-Bhumia and the Gond long heads predominate, they are not especially long. The low cephalic index is essentially reached by the extreme narrowness of the head. This narrowness of the skull does not only show at the level of the *eurya*, but also at the skull-base and the forehead. The biauricular breadth is striking by its low figures. The narrowness of the forehead is indicated by the constriction immediately above the eyebrows and by the small distance between the two *tubera frontalia*.

There is more variation with regard to the height of the head. Here, too, metrical and morphological observations agree. According to the measurements of the auricular height,

<sup>36</sup> The measurements were analysed by Dr. M. Weninger and published under the title: *Physisch-Anthropologische Untersuchungen an einigen Staemmen Zentralindiens*. Acta Ethnologica et Linguistica No. 3, Vienna, 1952.

the head is medium high with a tendency towards greater height. The same may be said of the forehead. In most cases the profile of the forehead is vertical or slightly retreating. Superciliary arches were only rarely observed. The convexity in the lower part of the forehead is frequently noticeable and results merely from the contraction of the *orbicularis oculi*, including the *depressor supercilii*, *depressor glabellae* and *corrugator glabellae*.

The face is characterized by medium height combined with great breadth. Although the measures of the zygomatic breadth are low, particularly in relation to the narrow skull, the face in front-view appears broad from the flat malar region down to the *gonia*. From there it slopes down to a narrow, short, pointed chin. The fold of the skin running from the lateral nose to the cheek is strongly marked.

In comparison to the small, extremely narrow cerebral part of the head, the face appears striking by its sturdiness and breadth. This portion between the cerebral and facial part is very characteristic and highly significant.

The mouth and chin regions are characterized by some very special features. Most conspicuous are the moderately high to thick mucous lips, and the projecting profile of the upper lip combined with the hypoplastic lower part of the face. The upper integumental lip is moderately high.

In most individuals, the external nose is of medium or fairly little height combined with highly developed breadth. According to the length of the basis, the lower part of the nose does not rise much from the face level. The prominence is moderate to slight.

The height-breadth index classes the Baiga-Bhumia and Gond as either chamaerrhine or mesorrhine near the upper limits of mesorrhiny. The distribution of individuals among the index classes yields the same result. Of 64 Baiga males, 18.7 per cent were hyperchamaerrhine, 62.5 per cent chamaerrhine, and 18.7 per cent mesorrhine. Of 49 Gond, 8.2 per cent were hyperchamaerrhine, 75.5 per cent chamaerrhine, and 16.3 per cent mesorrhine. The average nasal index of Baiga males was 92.2; of Baiga females 86.0; that of Gond males 91.3; of Gond females 90.1. With respect to the external nose, it may



be stated that many Baiga-Bhumia and Gond display the most primitive types, i.e., button- and funnel-shaped noses. The type with extremely distended nostrils occurs in highest frequency among the males. High and narrow noses with steep lateral parts are rare among them.

With regard to the eye, male Baiga-Bhumia and Gond show a high percentage of the type with hidden upper lid. This is the most primitive type. It is characterized by a 'hidden tarsal part', a lower upper lid without skin-fold and a deep-set eyeball. But a type with heavy skin-fold is even more numerous. Also we often find transitional forms.

The absolute measures and body proportions of the Baiga-Bhumia and Gond correspond to the fragility and delicacy which have been commented upon by all observers of these tribes. The stature is medium to low. In spite of that, the limbs, and particularly the legs, are relatively long. The trunk is distinctly short. The number of short statures is larger among the Bhumia-Baiga, while among the Gond medium-sized and even some tall individuals are found in greater numbers. The average height of 64 Baiga males was 1588 mm, of 21 Baiga females 1485 mm; while the average height of 49 Gond males was 1618 mm, that of 26 Gond females was 1498 mm. Of the measured 64 Baiga males, 54.7 per cent were less than 1600 mm tall, 42.2 per cent between 1600 and 1700 mm, and only 3.1 per cent more than 1700 mm. Of the 21 measured Baiga females, 57.1 per cent were less than 1490 mm, 42.9 per cent between 1490 and 1590 mm, and not one taller than 1590 mm. Of the 49 Gond males, 42.9 per cent were less than 1600 mm, 40.8 per cent between 1600 and 1700 mm, but 16.3 per cent more than 1700 mm. Of the 26 Gond females, 42.4 per cent were less than 1490 mm, and 57.6 per cent between 1490 and 1590 mm, and not one taller than 1590 mm.

The breadth measurements of the body are generally low. Pelvis and hips are narrow. The shoulder breadth is unusually small, though that of the Baiga is larger than that of the Gond. The acromiocrystal index of the body is high. The forearms and legs are slender, the calves poorly developed.

In spite of the fragility and delicacy of their frame, Baiga-Bhumia and Gond are of a strong physique, wiry and enduring.

Carrying a heavy load for long distances over difficult terrain without stopping, they can walk fast. When they rest, they usually squat on their haunches and do not sit cross-legged like the people of the plains. Women often sit straight with both legs stretched out, resting the back against a wall or post, or at least with one leg stretched out and the other drawn up to the chin or tucked under the thigh.

## 6. LANGUAGE

Both Gond and Bhumia of eastern Mandla today speak a dialect of Hindi, known as Gondwani or Mandlaha. It is closely related to Bagheli or Rewai, the language spoken in Baghelkhand and Chota Nagpur, which is also a dialect of Eastern Hindi. The most striking difference between this tongue and ordinary Hindi is the termination of the infinitive which is *-an*, and of the third person singular of the past tense which is *-is*. The first person suffix of the past tense is *a*, the second person *e*. The past participle ends *-e*. The sign of the genitive is *ker*, that of the dative *ke*, or *la*. On the whole, the language of the Baiga is very close to the Chattisgarhi dialect of Hindi.<sup>37</sup>

If the Baiga-Bhumia ever spoke a language of their own, they have completely forgotten it. But it is possible that certain words of the vocabulary of their original language entered into the Chattisgarhi or Gondwani dialect, for in this dialect certain words are used which are unknown in other parts of India where pure Hindi is spoken. However, so far no exact study of these peculiarities has been made.

It is curious that the Gond of eastern Mandla do not remember at all that at one time they spoke Gondi, which in Mandla District is called by the name of 'Parsi'.<sup>38</sup> From their

<sup>37</sup> Cf. F. R. Rudman (1912): p. 48 f.

<sup>38</sup> In Bastar State and in the adjoining Jaipuri zamindari of Madras, the Parja, a branch of the Gond tribe, speak a dialect of Gondi which is called Parji. The term 'Parsi' may be derived from the Parji language. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, p. 373; and Grierson (1906): Vol. 9, p. 554; Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 434 ff.

The Sanaurhia, a criminal caste, use a code language which they also



clan traditions and *garh* names, it is clear that many Gond families must have migrated into eastern Mandla coming from the west, or from a region where, until the present day, Gondi, a Dravidian dialect, is spoken. Those Gond who entered eastern Mandla coming from the former Rewa State and the other Central Indian States, may probably have come in small scattered groups. They therefore soon abandoned Gondi for the Chhatisgarhi dialect of Hindi which is spoken there. There they were also more intensively subjected to non-tribal influence. For the Rajas, Hinduised Gond, and their Hindu officials, carried on a strong propaganda for the Hindu religion and customs, and the Chhattisgarhi language.

## 7. GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF THE MANDLA DISTRICT

Mandla District, which forms the south-east portion of the Jabalpur Division, lies between latitude  $23^{\circ}22'$  and  $22^{\circ}12'$  North and longitude  $80^{\circ}1'$  and  $81^{\circ}50'$  East. The total area is 5,089 square miles. The greatest breadth from east to west is about 114 miles, and the length from north to south 83 miles. The District forms a part of the high and rugged tableland of the Satpura Hills, which separates the cotton-growing country of the South from the wheat-growing extension of the Malwa plateau in the North, and is the watershed of three distinct river-systems. In the south-west of the district, immediately around the town of Mandla, is a small, level plain of good land about 400 square miles in extent, and containing some 200 well-settled and closely-cultivated villages. This is known as the *Haweli*, or rice-country, and the *Pathar*, or wheat-tract. Elsewhere there are some small and scattered tracts of black soil, but the greater part of the district is mountainous and poor country for cultivation. This is the habitat of the Bhumia, Gond and other aboriginal tribes. The district is dominated by the range of the Maikal Hills, which gradually increase in height from west to east and culminate in the plateau of Chauradadar on the eastern border of the

call 'Parsi'. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, p. 484. According to others 'Parsi' simply means 'Persian'.

district. Minor ranges are that of Jagmandal in the south and Daldali in the north of the district.

The elevation of the district varies from 1,345 feet above sea level to 3,454 feet, the top of an isolated hill in the east of Dindori *tahsil*. The general elevation is from 1,800 to 2,400 feet.

The principal river-system of the district is that of the Narbada; only the Pathar tract in the south is drained by the Halon, and the extreme north and north-west of Dindori *tahsil* by the Johilla. The actual source of the Narbada is at Armarskantak, a sacred spot some three miles outside the Mandla border in the former Rewa State. The river, on entering Mandla District, at once pursues a tortuous and usually rock-bound course, in an upward curve, from east to west.

In point of grandeur and picturesqueness, the scenery of the district is second to none in the whole of Madhya Pradesh. The town of Mandla itself is beautifully situated on a sharp bend of the Narbada at its junction with the Banjar. Some parts of the district only, like the undulating grass prairies of Raigarh Bichhia or the bare and shadeless plains of Dindori, are dull and uninspiring, but the rugged jungles of the north and the almost evergreen *sal* forests of the Banjar valley have a grandeur all their own.

Owing to the height of its mountain ranges, the rainfall in Mandla District is fairly heavy. The average annual rainfall for Mandla is 53.80, and for Dindori 51.61 inches. Though Mandla and Dindori receive almost the same amount of rain, the distribution is somewhat different, the later rains in Dindori *tahsil* being heavier. For this reason the rice cultivation, prevalent in Mandla, is not popular in Dindori.

The climate of the Mandla District, owing to its mountainous character, is cool and exhilarating; the heat of the summer months is dry and healthy, while in winter there may be heavy falls of dew and occasionally severe frosts. The rainy season is unhealthy and the population suffers much from malaria and colds.

From earliest times until the close of the 6th century A.D., the history of Mandla District is wrapped in impenetrable obscurity. We know only that around the 6th and 7th centuries



this part of Madhya Pradesh was ruled by Rajput kings, of the clans of Kalachuri and Haihaya. The seat of the Haihaya-bansi kingdom was Tripuri (Tewar), within a few miles of Garha, the future capital of Garha-Mandla. The Haihaya-bansi power reached its zenith in the 11th century, after which it declined quickly until it ended in 1181 in a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Baghel Raja of Rewa.

During the rule of these Rajput princes, the jungles of eastern Mandla must have been inhabited mainly by the Baiga and similar hill tribes. It was before the immigration of the Gond. It was at that time, probably, that the Baiga lost their original language and adopted the Aryan dialect of their masters which they now speak. Being by tradition and personal liking hunters and shifting cultivators, they left the more fertile plains to the cultivating non-tribal castes, the Kurmis and Kunbis, who with other castes were pushed out of western India and gradually occupied the open river valleys of Central India.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, or even a little later, the Gond pushed their way into the territory which afterwards received from them the name Gondwana. Gradually they built up their political power, and after the defeat of the Haihayabansi kings, a Gond servant of the last king of Tripura, Jadhe Rao, usurped power and became the first of the Garha-Mandla kings.

The early history of the Garha-Mandla dynasty is buried under a mass of legends and fairy tales. Famous among the kings of Mandla is Sangram Shah, who in 1480 received four or five districts from his father, but ended his reign as lord of fifty-two districts. His son, Dalpat Shah, married Durgavati, a Rajput princess of Mahoba, who after Dalpat Shah's early death assumed the regency for her son, Bir Narayan. During the fifteen glorious years of her regency the country became very prosperous. But in the year 1564 A.D., the Imperial Viceroy, Asaf Khan, invaded the Gond kingdom and defeated the army of the Queen about twelve miles east of Garha. The Queen committed suicide after the defeat, while her son retreated to Chauragarh where he was besieged by Asaf Khan and met his death during an assault. He was succeeded by

<sup>39</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, p. 17.

Chandar Shah, a brother of Dalpat. Chandar Shah was given the throne by Akbar on the condition that he give up the ten northern districts which later formed the principality of Bhopal.

His great-grandson, Hirde Shah, transferred the capital from Garha to Mandla which was more difficult of access than Garha. Hirde Shah, who ruled for fifty years, devoted his whole reign to the improvement of his country which had suffered severely in the wars.<sup>40</sup> After his death, the dynasty declined quickly due to quarrels for the succession to the throne. In 1742, the Peshwa invaded the kingdom, killed the Raja Maharaj Shah, and demanded an annual tribute of 400,000 rupees from his son. This constant drain on the resources of the kingdom proved too severe, and the country went to ruin. Fields were allowed to lie fallow and soon turned into jungle. The impoverished Gond kings fell victims to innumerable intrigues and assassinations, till the last Gond Raja of Mandla, Narhar Shah, was tortured to death by the Maratha General Morarji. Mandla became a *subah* (district) of the Saugor Marathas. This happened in 1781. In the year 1799, Mandla fell to the Bhonsla Raja of Nagpur. The district had much to suffer from the pillaging bands of the Pindaris, who reduced it to a state of the greatest penury and desolation. This state of affairs continued till the British came to rule Mandla in 1818, at the close of the Maratha war under General Marshall.

In 1851, Mandla was formed into an independent district. During the upheaval of 1857, there was some unrest and fighting, but the rebel forces were defeated and the country settled down to a peaceful and contented existence, which, however, was severely disturbed by the famine of 1897. It caught the population unawares and reduced them once again to great penury.<sup>41</sup>

The history of the Mandla District in the first half of the 20th century is marked by few changes. The district is still largely peopled by Gond and other aboriginal tribes.

<sup>40</sup> He also brought many Lodhi as cultivators into his kingdom and gave them large grants of waste land in the interior in order that they might clear it of forest. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, p. 112 ff.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. F. A. Rudman (1912): pp. 1-40, E. Chatterton (1918).



PART I

MATERIAL CULTURE OF  
THE GOND AND BHUMIA





## CHAPTER II

### THE HOMESTEAD

#### 1. THE HOUSE

A GOND or Bhumia homestead consists usually of a number of houses, never less than two, often four or five; for it also houses the families of married sons, often also of a son-in-law, whose separate living quarters are built in line with or at an angle to the parental house. Besides these dwellings (*bangla*), there is the stable, a shed for various uses, and often also a separate hut for occasional guests.

Bhumia houses do not differ much from Gond houses, except in size and in cleanliness. They are usually smaller and more primitive than the houses of the Gond. Gond and Bhumia build houses with either gabled (*didor*) or hipped (*chaupar*) roofs. In some families, the house must have a gabled roof, in others a hipped roof. The form of the roof is changed only if a family has experienced much misfortune or sickness while staying in a certain house. Such a house is at last abandoned and a new one built with the alternative form of roof.

Houses and huts are usually built around a square courtyard which is open at one side, but shut off from the village path by a fence or hedge with a gate (*pharka*) in the middle. The main house is generally about eleven cubits (*hath*) in length and eight cubits in breadth. Some houses are slightly smaller, others larger, according to the size of the families living in them.

When a Gond or Bhumia selects a site for a new house, he first measures out the area which he requires for his buildings. He prefers as the site for his new homestead a slightly elevated plot and, if possible, red gravel soil (*murram*). It should not be too far from a stream or water-place, nor too close either.

When he has found a suitable site on fairly level ground,

large enough for the buildings he plans to set up, and when other people too have approved of his choice, he places three stones, one on top of the other, at the four corners of the plot chosen. He also places three stones at the point where he wants to set the three middle posts in support of the ridge of the roof. Then he ties a string round the four corners of the chosen site. This is done in the evening. The next morning he returns to the site and if he finds the stones still undisturbed, he believes this to be a sign that he should build his house there. But if the stones have been disturbed and scattered by some animal stumbling over them during the night, the man goes in search of another site, believing that his family would come to harm if he were to build on that particular site.

Instead of stones, the Gond or Bhumia may put three, five or seven grains of husked rice at each corner. If some animal eats them up, he takes it as a sign that the house should not be built there. Sometimes a man has to change the site three or four times.

When everything seems to be in order, he says: '*Yeh dharti hamko thik lagta*' ('This place suits me'). Then he decides on which side the front of his house should be, and on this side he marks the points for the setting of the door posts (*thuniya*). My Bhumia informants said that the door of the new dwelling should face towards the east so that the inmates on leaving their house in the morning can stoop under the low door frame before the rising sun. This is called *suraj ki binti*, 'prayer to the sun'. The houses of the married sons of the family may face another direction, usually the north, but no house should have a southern frontage, since the south is the region of Yama, the God of Death; nor a western direction, since the direction of the setting sun is called *mara mukh*, 'the face of death'. My Gond informants said that their caste fellows were less particular in the choice of an eastern front for their houses and that the position of their houses depended more on the general setting and formation of the terrain. But most houses face the east, because in winter people like to sit in front of their houses and bask in the sun.

When the ground-plan of the proposed house has been fixed,



the builder goes to the village priest. The Gond always request the official village priest (the one who performs the annual sowing ceremony) to 'bless' the site for the new house. The village priest (a Bhumia) is considered by the Gond, 'master of the ground' or *dharti ka malik*. If the village priest has died, his wife may act in his place (as she may also perform the solemn sowing ceremony). Even the sorcerer (*panda*) who enjoys the special patronage of a god or spirit must call the village priest when he wants to build a new house; except for the hut which he builds for his god or spirit (*marai*), he too requires the blessing of the official village priest. The Bhumia, on the other hand, do not seem to be so particular; among them the builder of the house himself or another elderly man of the village, who proved helpful in selecting the right site for the proposed house, may perform this offering.

When a Gond invites the official village priest for the offering, he may, for instance, say to him: '*Dharti thor hai. Hum, dhup de. Ham ghar banao, Baiga Baba*' ('The ground is yours. Offer butter and incense. We want to build a house, priest'). When the village priest arrives at the site, he sprinkles some liquor over the place and offers *hum* [by burning some clarified butter (*ghee*) mixed with gum resin (*rar*) of the *sarai* tree (*Boswellia serrata*) on a small fire or a smouldering dung-cake]. Then he breaks a coconut, offers a few crumbs and distributes the rest among the men attending the ceremony. This offering is addressed to *Thakur deo*, the supreme god of the Bhumia, to whom the officiating priest prays: '*Bhagwan, hamen sukh de is jagah men*' ('O God, let us be happy at this place'). Then he digs a hole on the spot where the door post is to be set up. Other men soon take over and finish the digging, and also dig the holes for the corner pillars. When the holes are sufficiently deep, the village priest throws a few copper coins (*paisa*) into each hole, then he himself sets up the door post, while the other men fill the hole with stones and boulders and ram them down. Thereafter, all sit down and finish the bottle of liquor which the officiating priest broke open to sprinkle on the ground. How many men he invites for this ceremony depends on the wealth and liberality of the builder.

The Bhumia, after having set the corner posts, often perform a further offering. The builder of the house, or another man helping him, pours a few drops of liquor (*daru*) on the ground around the posts. He may also burn some clarified butter, incense and unrefined sugar (*gur*), all the time invoking his favourite god (*deo*) or goddess (*mata*) to bless the new house. Then only do the men sit down and drink the rest of the liquor.

Usually there are four posts on the front side of a house, the second and third post being at the same time the door posts, two or three posts in the middle row carrying the ridge of the roof, and three posts in the back row. These posts are called *thamar*. The top ends of these pillars are forked to allow the connecting transverse long-beams to rest firmly in them. The roof-beams are called *bareri*. Whenever possible, the middle rafter should be of one piece. But if the house is too long, a pillar is set up in the centre to support the joint of two rafters. The roof-beams which connect the frontal corner posts are called *sajra* in Mandlaha dialect, and *batoti* in Hindi, while those which carry the ridge of the roof are called *malga* in Mandlaha, and *magri* in Hindi.

Then bamboo (*Dendrocalamus strictus*) or *katwa* (*Acacia catechu*) saplings are cut in the jungle and spliced into long thin sticks called *kamti*, while those of *katwa* wood are known as *balgi*. These sticks are tied between the posts as supports for the mats which form the walls of the new house. The mats are plaited of the reeds of *chirra* grass (*Themeda laxa* Stapf.) and are called *tattya*. *Chirra* grass has very thick and strong reeds. Before cutting, the grass is set afire to trim the reeds of their leaves. After cutting them, the reeds are beaten against the ground till all the leaves fall off. From these reeds, mats are plaited which are then tied with bark fibres of a tree called *mohlain*, *mahul* in Hindi, (*Bauhinia vahlii*), over the crude wickerwork of bamboo or *katwa* sticks.

At last the roof is fixed: stout planks are laid out about three feet apart and firmly tied down with bark ropes (*mohlain dora*), the ends resting on the ridge of the roof and on the lower front or back row of the transverse beams. Over these planks, the builders spread mats of *kharia* grass, beginning at



the eaves and working up in even layers until the ridge is reached, each successive layer overlapping the one below it. In the same manner they spread over this layer of grass large *mohlain* leaves, again beginning at the eaves projecting a few feet over the front and back walls. This layer of leaves is covered with bundles of grass tied down and held in position with sticks and poles laid across the roof, and tied down with bark ropes to the stout planks underneath the thatch. This is done as a precaution against a storm blowing off the whole roof. The leaves between the two layers of grass make the roof fairly waterproof. The thatch on the roof should be renewed every second or third year, for in spite of every precaution it gets blown off easily in the violent gusts of wind which mark the beginning of the monsoon.

The front of every house has a small veranda about four feet broad. It is called *parchhi*. It is formed simply by prolonging the roof several feet beyond the front wall of the house. The veranda is supported by three or four shorter posts. The floor of this veranda is always slightly higher than the courtyard. It is either on the same level with the interior of the house, or even higher. In the latter case, only the portions right and left of the door are about a foot or two higher, while the space immediately before the entrance is on a level with the interior of the house. This veranda is used for the storage of various implements, and often as a sleeping place for guests. Before the entrance is a square porch (*angana*), often surrounded at the sides by a low wall of mud about a foot high. This porch, usually protected against the sun by a roof of leaves or grass, is used for all kinds of activities, such as cleaning or grinding millet or rice, gossiping with friends and neighbours and as a shelter in rainy weather.

When the roof of the house is finished and the walls are fixed, the men's work is done. Now the work of the women begins: the wickerwork of the walls must be covered with a coating of wattle and daub, several inches deep. For this purpose, the women of the house dig for red clay (*gairu matti*) which they mix with the chaff and husks of *kodo* (*Paspalum scribulatum*). The clay must be well mixed with chaff (*bhusa*)

and thoroughly kneaded, first by feet and then by hand. The plaster is applied in a finger-thick layer by hand. It should be renewed at least once a year, just before the monsoon sets in. This kind of work is always done by women.

Nowadays, many Gond and some Bhumia have started to build more solid houses. The walls consist of big lumps of clay or of large sun-dried bricks. Some even cover the roof of their houses with tiles. Burned tiles and bricks are generally bought from professional bricklayers (*kumar*) since until recent times the Gond, but especially the Bhumia, were averse to building a kiln and baking bricks. Their intense veneration for Mother Earth (*Dharti mata*) did not allow them to burn clay in a kiln.

The lack of windows in a Gond or Bhumia house renders the interior rather dark. Light and air enter only by the door and through chinks and cracks in the walls. Ventilation is also provided by the open space left just below the roof, as the side walls do not always reach the roof. Here, too, is the escape for the smoke from the hearth-fire which soon coats roof and rafters with a thick layer of soot.

The front and back walls of the house are protected against the slashing rains of the monsoon and the rays of the sun by overhanging eaves.

After the structure of the house has been completed, the floor of the interior, the veranda and the porch (*angana*) is laid. The ground is first covered with a layer of gravel (*murram*) which is well stamped and levelled. Then floor and walls are covered with a finger-thick layer of red clay. This coating of the floor and the walls is left to dry for a day or two, then the women give it a coating with a mixture of fresh cow-dung and soft white clay (*chuhi matti*), diluted in water. A similar coating is spread over the floor and porch at least once a week; some women renew it almost daily. In contrast to the white clay, ochre-coloured clay (*gairu matti*) is also used for painting the walls and the floor of the porch.

Bhumia women decorate the front walls of their houses with drawings of geometrical design, while Gond women prefer the figures of men and animals, such as tigers, elephants, horses and birds. The Gond seem to have more artistic talent



than the Bhumia. They are also cleaner. The figures on the front wall of the house are drawn either in white or red clay; often they are set up on the wall at both sides of the door in a finger-thick relief. The floor of the porch, too, is often decorated with drawings of a geometrical design, in the same colours (white and ochre) as the walls.

With this coating of the walls and the floor, the house is now ready for habitation. But before the inmates may move in, it must be dedicated to the house-god, *Narayan deo*. For his reception, a spot on the threshold of the door is smeared with diluted cattle manure (*gobar*). Grains of *kodo* are scattered over the door sill and a young male chicken is made to pick up the grains. Then it is let loose. A year later it is killed; its head is crushed against the door sill. *Hum* is offered and liquor sprinkled on the doorstep with the prayer: '*He Narayan deo, hamare upar pahara*' ('*Narayan deo*, keep watch over us'). Another prayer, which may be said on this occasion, has the same meaning: '*He Narayan deo, hamare par rachha kar*' ('*Narayan deo*, watch over us'). After the sacrifice the cock is boiled and eaten by the members of the family with a dish of rice (*bhat*). From this day, *Narayan deo* is believed to have taken his abode in the new house, where he dwells in the door sill of the main entrance. Sometimes the head of the family gives a dinner to the whole caste community of the village.

On the same day when the cock is sacrificed to *Narayan deo*, another one is offered to *Dulha deo*. This latter cock is killed with the ceremonial axe (*pharsa*) while the slayer prays: '*He Dulha deo, bhat aur dar kabhi jhai bigre*' ['*Dulha deo*, may the rice (*bhat*) and the pulse (*dar*) never get spoiled']. From this prayer it appears that *Dulha deo* is the god of cooking.

Every homestead has a special room for guests. Sometimes a separate hut is built for them. Such a house is called *bharota*. It is here that the guests stay and enjoy some privacy and sleep at night. Guests who belong to a different caste may cook here. In the absence of guests, the hut is used as a store-room or the women grind their flour there; when guests are expected, the house is vacated. The front side of this guesthouse which faces the court-yard is usually quite open,

while the back wall has a door that leads outside into the village path.

At one side of the square courtyard or at the back of the main dwelling is the cattle shed (*sar*), usually slightly lower than the main house. Its walls consist of bamboo wickerwork without a plastering of clay, or of stout planks which are set closely together and are tied with strong bark ropes.

Before the new stable may be used, a sacrifice has to be performed in honour of *Holera deo*, the cattle god, or of *Bhainsasur*, the god of the water-buffaloes. A goat is sacrificed to *Holera deo*, its throat being cut in the stable with the prayer: 'Receive, O *Holera deo*, receive this offering and protect our stable.' To the god of the buffaloes they sacrifice a young pig by smashing its head against the forehead of a buffalo. The sacrificial meal is partaken in the stable by all members of the family, some friends and neighbours.

In a corner formed by two huts standing at an angle, a square space is fenced in with stout planks. Inside the fencing a hut is erected for the pigs. They are let loose in the morning, but not for long. For the most part of the day they are locked up to prevent them from breaking into the garden (*bari*) which is at the back of every house.

Another hut is built to store fodder for the cattle, agricultural implements and various other useful articles.

Bhumia houses are usually small and low, but neat and clean, though less so than the houses of the Gond. The latter always whitewash their houses and keep them spotlessly clean. Also the immediate surroundings are kept clean and may not be used, as in many non-tribal villages, as latrines. Nor are the village lanes used for defecation; for this purpose Gond and Bhumia go into the garden.

## 2. HOME LIFE

Gond and Bhumia work, eat and sleep in the house or in the courtyard. In the hot season they take their meals in the courtyard; at other times inside the house.

All take off their shoes when they enter a house (if they wear any at all). A man with boots of Western fashion, how-



ever, can enter without taking them off. But he must not go near the fireplace.

No one whose food a Gond or Bhumia may not accept is allowed to touch a water-pot or a cooking-pan. But a Bhumia would not pour its contents away if a pot were touched accidentally by a Gond or a man of another caste, unless he was an 'untouchable'. The Gond are more fastidious, at least in places where they are in closer contact with non-tribals.

While in former times the Gond treated the Bhumia like caste fellows and even allowed them to approach the fireplace, this is no longer done since the Gond refuse to eat and to smoke with the Bhumia. The latter retaliate by refusing the Gond the same privilege in their houses. Both Gond and Bhumia on principle grant to other castes only such rights as are conceded to them by the same castes. For this reason, no man of another caste, not even a Brahmin, is permitted to approach the hearth, which is partitioned off from the main room by one or two big grain bins. The main room may be entered by anyone, even a low-caste man, a Kol or Chamar.

If the inmates of the house are absent, no one but a near relative is allowed to open the door and to enter. Not even a neighbour would do it in the absence of all the inmates. A person breaking this rule would be accused of stealing.

If a woman or girl is alone at home, a man is forbidden to enter. If he has any business to settle, he may do so outside the door, on the porch. If a man enters a house when a woman is alone at home, observant neighbours would be sure to suspect a love affair between the two. And if the matter is brought before the caste council, the man would be punished for his indiscretion, unless he proved that nothing untoward had happened.

A visitor from another village who stays overnight is given sleeping accommodation in the family dwelling, if no separate guest room or hut is available.

Gond and Bhumia usually sleep inside the house, close to the door. At night they do not keep a light burning like non-tribals in the area do, but sleep in complete darkness. In the hot season, however, they sleep outside in the courtyard, but shut the door of the house to keep out prowling dogs and

other animals.

Small children, boys as well as girls, sleep with their parents. When they get a little older, they sleep apart in a corner, separated from their parents by a grain bin or another piece of furniture. Grown-up sons and daughters, before their marriage, sleep in the house of their parents, but boys and girls do not sleep near one another. Married couples sleep in separate huts which are built close to the parental house.

When at rest, people should not lie down with their feet pointing towards the north because this is the position in which they will be laid out when they die. Before they go to sleep, they take off as many clothes as decency permits. Even in the cold winter nights they sleep practically without cover, either on the ground on a thin sheet or blanket, or on a cot (*katya*). When sleeping in the open during winter, they light a fire and turn the bare chest and belly towards it, while they cover the back with a thin sheet. Often it happens that in sleep they roll into the fire and get burned. This very often happens to children.

People who sleep on a cot in the cold season place a bowl with smouldering cattle dung under the bed. The dung-fire keeps up a steady glow throughout the night and gives out a fair amount of heat. This bowl with the smouldering dung, called *ghursi*, is of the same material (a mixture of clay and *kodo* chaff) of which the grain bins are made.

### 3. HOUSEHOLD UTENSILS

#### (a) Grain Bin

To one side of the room—there is generally only one room in a Gond or Bhumia house—at the right side of the door, we find several clay receptacles for the storage of grain, called *kothi* or *khotla*. They are either square or round, similar in shape to a lantern glass, and of various sizes, some small and only a few feet high, others six to eight feet high and of corresponding bulk.

The structure of the grain bin is made up either of one or several cylinders placed one upon the other, with a flat bottom and a removable cover, formed by hand from a mixture of



clay and threshold *kodo* straw. When the bin is full, the cover is placed on the top and all fissures and holes are carefully blocked with a coating of fresh cow-dung to make the grain-bin air-tight.

Through a hole near the bottom of the bin, the daily quota of grain which a family requires is removed. After use, the hole is sealed with a rag-ball.

The grain bins are set on four clods of clay to allow some space between the bottom of the bin and the floor. This is done to prevent rats from digging a way into the grain bins from the ground. The bins are used for the storage of all kinds of grain. It is safe in them, even if kept for a year, provided the grain is thoroughly dry when it is stored. Once or twice a year the grain is removed from the bins and again dried in the sun. The size of the grain bins in a house is a good indication of the wealth of the owner or the number of members in the family.

The grain bins are placed in the room in such a way as to shut off the fireplace and the inner portion from that near the door. This partition also gives some privacy to the parents who sleep on one side of the bins, while their children sleep on the other side, out of sight.

No grain should be removed from the bins on a Sunday. The reason for this rule is unknown.

### (b) Grinding Mills

The aboriginals of eastern Mandla use two kinds of grinding mills, one of stone (*chakkia*), which is used for hard grain like gram, *masur*, *urda*, wheat, maize and *tuar*; the other of sun-baked clay (*jata*) which grinds soft grains like *kodo*, *kutki*, or rice.

The *chakkia* consists of two circular discs each cut out of a single piece of stone and shaped by members of the Dhimar caste (fishermen). In Mandla District, the manufacture of these stone discs is, besides fishing, the traditional and specific trade of this caste. The nether disc, called *thari*, is criss-crossed with grooves which are cut into the stone with a chisel. The bottom of the upper stone, called *mur*, which is thicker and heavier, is rough, made so by holes being cut into

it with a pointed chisel. The grooves and holes must be renewed from time to time. The upper stone revolves on a strong iron pin fixed in the centre of the lower stone. This pin is called *khuta*. To allow the upper stone to rotate and also to feed the mill with grain, a hole, a few inches wide, is cut through the centre of the upper stone.

The woman doing the grinding sits on the floor, one leg stretched out, the other drawn in, the shin resting against the mill. The stone mill is turned with one hand while with the other the woman pours the grain in fistfuls into the hole in the centre of the upper stone.

The *jata*, which is much bigger than the *chakka*, is not of stone but of clay. To give the black clay more consistence, *kodo* chaff (*bhusa*) is mixed with it. The clay is then thoroughly wetted and vigorously kneaded by hand and foot before it can be formed into the mill. This work is done by women.

The woman building a *jata* first sticks a stout wooden pin into the floor in a corner of the veranda or of the room where the mill is wanted. Around this pin she moulds the lower disc, about two feet in diameter and only a few inches high. The upper stone (*mur*), of the same width but much higher and slightly cupped, is mounted on a narrow board to give it more durability. The wooden pin around which the upper stone rotates, passes through a hole in the centre of the board on which the upper disc rests. Through the same hole the mill is fed with grain by the grinding women. At one end of the board a handle is affixed by which the mill is worked.

The *jata* is usually served by two women who sit facing each other, both gripping the handle with one hand and pouring grain into the mill with the other.

A few inches away from the base of the mill is built up a low ring of clay which prevents the flour pouring from the mill from spilling all over the floor.

For the grinding of spices, Gond and Bhumia women use a stone slab which is called *silota*, and a stone roller, called *lorha*. The stone roller is worked with both hands by the woman crushing the spices.



### (c) Grain-Pestle

For porridge (*pej*), it is sufficient to husk the grain superficially in the *jata*. But for a clean husking the grain must be pounded with the pestle. It is a heavy log of wood, round, about six inches thick, slightly thinner at the top, with a notch around the middle to allow the pounding woman a firmer grip. The pestle, called *musar*, must fit into the hole (*khari*) in a log of wood which is let into the floor of the main room or veranda. The pounding woman sits before this hole filled with grain, one leg stretched out and supporting with its thigh the foot of the other bent leg. The woman accompanies each stroke of the heavy pestle with a low grunt, a habit which can be noticed in men also when they have to work with a pickaxe or the digging stick.

Rice, *kodo* and *kutki* must be pounded first with the grain pestle to remove the fine skin from the grain.

### (d) The Winnowing Scoop

After the grain has been ground and pounded, it is cleaned of the bran with the winnowing scoop. The *supā*, as it is called, is a square plate with raised edges at three sides like a shovel, and made of tightly plaited *chirra* grass blades. The winnowing woman holds the scoop with both hands and fans the grain in such a manner that the lighter husks and false grains gather at one side of the scoop, while small grains of sand, being heavier, collect at another corner which is held slightly lower. Through long practice, the women in a short time sift the grain from the chaff.

Every morning the daily quota of grain required for the meal of the whole family is ground or pounded and winnowed by the women, for the flour should not be kept longer than a day or else it goes stale.

The winnowing scoop is manufactured by the Dhulia or Basor, who are professional basket-makers. But where bamboo and *chirra* grass are available, the Bhumia and Gond make winnowing fans.

Pulse, as *masur* or *tuar*, is first winnowed, then perfunctorily ground in the stone mill to remove the husk. Then it is winnowed again.

(e) *Baskets*

Tribesmen who live so close to the forest, as the Gond and Bhumia do, naturally use the material at hand for all the articles which they require in their daily use. Baskets of various types, therefore, which can with little labour and less cost be manufactured from the material abundantly at hand, replace containers which people in a different environment would make of other material. The Gond and Bhumia make baskets of every possible shape and form: square, cylindrical, triangular; open or with a lid; tightly knitted or loosely plaited; from bamboo strips, grass blades and twigs; large and small. For every possible type of basket they have a special name, such as *sikosi*, *daura*, *jhapi*, *mora*, and so on.

Most of these baskets are made and used exactly in the same manner by all the jungle tribes of the district, but in one point the aboriginal tribes differ from the professional low-caste basket-makers, the Basor or Dhulia who are often treated as 'untouchables': they do not make baskets for sale. They make them solely for their own use. They may give them away, but will not sell them.

The Bhumia claim to have more skill in basket-making than the Gond. The reason probably is that they have more practice in this work, while the Gond can more easily afford to buy baskets in the market. Like the Basor or Dhulia, as this caste of professional basket-makers is called in Mandla District, the Gond and Bhumia use a heavy, curved knife, the *banka*, as their only instrument for basket-making.

(f) *Pots and Pans*

Usually all food is cooked in earthen pots (*handi* or *harya*), rarely in iron pots (*battua*). The vessels in which the water is fetched from the well or pond are almost always of burnt clay. These earthen pots the Gond and Bhumia buy at the weekly bazaar, at Dindori for instance, from potters (*kumar*) who wander from village to village. The pots made by local potters are of inferior quality; people prefer pots which are imported from Manwai or from a place in the former Rewa State, about 40 miles east of Dindori. It appears that the clay at these places is of superior quality.



Unlike the Gond, the Bhumia can rarely afford the large brass pitchers (*kasaidi*) which are found in most non-tribal homes. But even the poor Bhumia have at least one brass pot, called a *lota*, a small pear-shaped vessel for general use. Wealthy Gond and Bhumia may own a few brass plates (*thali* or *tathia*) on which the meal is served, while poor people eat and drink from platters made of *mohlain* or *palas* (*Butea frondosa*) leaves which the women prepare afresh for every meal. Once used, they are thrown away. Generally speaking, brass pots and plates are oftener found in the houses of the wealthier Gond. They buy them from the Kasar, a professional caste of brass-makers and traders.

When the women fetch water from the well or pond, early in the morning and late in the afternoon after a day's work in the field, they carry the heavy pots on their heads. As a head protection, they use a roll made of a strip of cloth or of neatly knotted strings. This roll is called *gurhni* (or *gudhari* in the local dialect). This roll plays a special part in the snake exorcism of the Gond and Bhumia. If it is made of strings, it is called *giri*.

Besides earthen pitchers and pots and a few brass vessels, the Gond and Bhumia also use gourds called *lauki*. Such pots are called *lauka*. Also spoons and ladles made of gourds are quite common, called *tinna*. Ladles of wood (*chatwa*) and iron (*karahi*) are used to stir the porridge (*pej*) in the pot over the fire. To sieve the rice or *kodai* after boiling, the women of eastern Mandla use a flat bamboo basket (*pasani*). The flat cakes of *urda* or wheat flour, which the people sometimes prepare, are baked over the open fire on iron pans (*tawa*).

For measuring grain, these aborigines use a wooden cylindrical vessel which they call *barria*. It is made of one solid block of wood, hollowed out with a chisel; it has an iron band around the bottom to prevent it from splitting. Grain is measured by the *seer* (a litre or two pounds in weight), in *kureya* (2½ seers), *kuru* (5 seers), and *khandi* (20 seers).

#### (g) Furniture

In the matter of furniture, there is scarcely any difference

between Gond and Bhumia. The Gond may have more furniture because in general they are wealthier than the Bhumia.

While many Gond and Bhumia sleep on the floor, either in the house or in the courtyard, others use a bed to sleep on. This bed (*khat* or *khatya*) consists of a rectangular frame on four rather short legs; the frame is spanned with a network of strings of flax (*san*) or coconut fibres (*coir*), or of tightly plaited bamboo splints. This bed, from the wooden frame to the string-netting, is home-made.

These beds are put out of the way during the day or carried into the courtyard in the sun; for they are usually infested with bugs which hide in the fissures and joints of the wooden frame. Before going to sleep, people spread a thin sheet on their bed. This sheet is also used as a cover. Some people use a kind of mattress made of rags sewn together into a thick blanket.

Of other furniture there is little in a Gond or Bhumia house. Few of them have chests or cupboards for their clothes; but tin trunks are becoming quite common now, in which are stored the festive clothes and the silver ornaments rarely worn by the women. But generally the clothes are hung on the rafters in the house; other articles are kept in niches in the wall. Seeds, medicines, spices and dried fruits are preserved in empty gourds or baskets stuck in the eaves.

But in every house one finds some small stools with four short legs (from four to twelve inches high) and a seat covered with a string-netting or bamboo-plaiting. Such stools are called *machia*, while another kind which consists simply of a square block of wood with four stumps as legs is called *parho* or *pirha*. Sometimes these stools are provided with a back; just two stout planks about two feet high. These stools, however, are not really intended to be sat on; people usually squat on them.

#### (h) Axes

Gond and Bhumia use the same types of axes; they have two or three different kinds: the *tangia*, *pharsa* and *basula*.

The *tangia* has a heavy rectangular blade, with a cutting edge three or four inches broad. This axe is used for chop-



ping wood, felling trees, etc. Any man going to the jungle or to his field carries the *tangia* on his shoulder. It is also used for self-defence against wild animals.

The *pharsa* is a kind of ceremonial axe with a slim, slightly curved blade, similar to a battle axe. This axe is mainly used for killing and skinning animals, for cutting up the meat, and so on. It is scarcely ever used for woodwork.

There is also a smaller axe of the same shape and for the same purpose, which is called *pharsi*. The *tangia*, the *pharsa* and the *pharsi* are made by the local Agaria, professional smiths.

For fine woodwork, the Gond and Bhumia now use the *basula*. It is obviously an imported implement. Its shape resembles that of a hoe, but it has a shorter and heavier blade. A *basula* is nowadays found in almost every Gond and Bhumia house; for these aboriginals, well skilled in handling it in all kinds of woodwork, make almost all their agricultural implements themselves. The *basula* replaces a chisel as well as a plane. When working with it, they hold the *basula* very short, placing the index-finger on the back of the blade.

#### (i) Other Iron Tools

There are several other iron tools which the Bhumia as well as the Gond use. Most important among them is the ploughshare (*phar*), which is simply a pointed iron spike about two feet long. It is affixed to the inner side of the tapering end of the wooden plough and is held in position by an iron ring. This ploughshare as well as the iron ring are supplied by the Agaria, the iron-workers of the Gond and Bhumia villages in eastern Mandla. These ploughshares are, of course, available also at the local bazaars.

For digging up roots and tubers, the aboriginals of eastern Mandla use either the ploughshare or an iron spike of the same shape but somewhat longer. It is called *khanta* (thorn). It is stuck into the hollow end of a bamboo stick split at the top and firmly tied together with bark fibres. The Agaria also supply the digging spike.

For digging in stony soil a small pickaxe (*kudari*) may be used, or the so-called *gainti*, which is similar in shape but

heavier. Such implements, however, as also the hoe (*phaura*), are not in general use; nor are they made by the local Agaria. They are bought in the bazaar from non-tribal smiths (Lohar).

A kind of primitive sickle (*hassia*), however, is supplied by the Agaria; but a sickle with a steel edge can be had only from the Lohar. In former times, when the aborigines simply cut the ears of their crops, the *hassia* served its purpose. But for cutting grass and the stalks of their crops, they require a sickle with a steel edge.

The knives which the Gond and Bhumia use are called *churi*; if they can be folded, they are called *chakku*.

At least for ceremonial purposes, for instance, at weddings, Gond and Bhumia require a so-called *saruta*, the *supari*-cutter, a kind of shears which can be had in the bazaar. It certainly is not an aboriginal article. It suggests that at least the Gond, from whom the Bhumia may have adopted this article, come from a region where *pan* and areca nuts are very popular.

#### (j) *Bow and Arrow of the Bhumia*

While the traditional weapon of the Gond is the axe (*pharsa*), the Bhumia, at least in times past, used to hunt with bow and arrow. Even where they would be permitted to use the bow, the Gond do not seem to be familiar with this weapon. This may be considered an important distinctive feature in the cultural life of the Gond.

At present, however, few Bhumia of eastern Mandla own bows and arrows, as the use of this weapon is forbidden by law. Even its mere possession is outlawed. I did not find a single bow in the villages near Dindori, though in the more interior and less accessible tracts of eastern Mandla this weapon is still in use by the Bhumia. Bow and arrow may still be found in the adjoining former Rewa State; there it is not yet forbidden to use it.

The Bhumia bow is of bamboo. It is a simple longbow, normally bent, with knobs at the slightly tapering ends to hold the sling of the bowstring. From tip to tip, the bow measures from 4' 6" to 4' 10". It is plain convex, flat on the inner side and rounded on the outside.

The string is a band of stiff bamboo fibre, about a quarter-



inch broad and half as thick. It is attached to the knobbed ends of the bow, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ' from either extremity, with slings of *duri* string. This is called *echarpé* stringing.

The arrow is about 1' 9" long. The shaft is made of a reed-like grass known as *tir*. It has radial feathering. The feathering is made in the following manner: Tail-feathers of the common vulture (*gidha*) are split into halves, their down cut short to half an inch. Five such pieces of about three inches' length are arranged at regular intervals on the arrow in such a manner that they touch the shaft with the quill cut in half. Then they are tied to the shaft with thin twine at intervals of half an inch. At either end a thicker thread is used.

Just below the feathering, the shaft should have a knob. Around this knob and the notched end, the Bhumia wind thin fibres crosswise to allow the bowmen a firm grip on the arrow.

The arrowhead, which is of iron, is made by the local *Agaria*. It is lance-shaped and measures about five inches in length, with two barbs one and a half inches long, its whole length on either side sharpened to a knife-like edge. The shaft of the arrowhead, which is only a quarter-inch thick, is stuck in the shaft of *tir* grass like a thorn, and then firmly tied to it with fibres. The whole wrapping is besmeared with red lead.

Bow and arrow, wherever they are still in use, are made by the Bhumia themselves; and there are some men who are specially skilled in bow-making.

The Bhumia use the Mediterranean release: they hold the arrow between middle and index finger and pull the string with these two fingers. When I showed a Bhumia the primary release, he shook his head in disapproval and made the objection that holding the arrow with thumb and index finger would not allow a firm grip on the arrow nor give any force to the pull at the string.

The Bhumia call the bow *dhanush*, the arrow *tir*, words derived from Sanskrit and used by the Hindi-speaking non-tribals as well.

In order to kill their prey more effectively, the Bhumia put poison on their arrowheads. This poison is called *dawai*, (medicine), a Hindi word. It is supplied by bangle-sellers

(of the Jogi caste) who buy it secretly at Kaloti, a market-place in Bilaspur District. Baiga from the surrounding jungles are said to bring the poisonous roots to the market at Kaloti for sale. They alone know where to collect them in the forest. These roots are not found in the jungle of eastern Mandla. My Bhumia informants, who refused to show me the roots, told me that there are three different kinds of roots which contain the poison: a black root, called *chaigundia*, another kind which is yellow like turmeric (*hardi*), and a third kind which is white. The poison contained in the black root is the strongest.

The price of this arrow-poison is rather high; a *tola* (fortieth part of a pound) costs from three to five rupees. The quantity of poison required for one arrowhead costs four to five annas. The Bhumia of course buy the poison in small quantities, as apparently it loses its power if stored too long. (It is probably an alkaloid.)

A Bhumia must take certain precautions when he wants to apply the poison to his arrows. He first ties a cloth before his mouth and wraps his hands in a rag, lest any of the poisonous substance gets into a wound. Then he scrapes small chips from the root, and pounds and grinds them to fine powder. This is done inside the house, to prevent the powder from being blown off by a gust of wind. The powder is then wetted with spittle. To test its strength, the man catches a fowl, plucks a few feathers and applies the salve on the wounds. If the fowl dies within an hour, the poison is considered sufficiently strong. Now cotton wool (*rua*) is soaked in the mixture and carefully wrapped around the shaft of the arrowhead just below the barbs. It is tied down with twine wound crosswise. On the lower end of the wrapping the Bhumia presses an iron ring to keep the poison-soaked wool in place on the shaft of the arrowhead.

When an animal is shot with the poisoned arrow, the poison enters the wound. They say that the poison first affects the wounded animal's hoofs which become loose and crack. The animal cannot run away and falls down. According to my informants, the black poison is strongest: any animal shot with an arrow to which the black poison has been applied, drops



dead within a hundred yards. The white poison kills the animal after a run of about half a mile, while the yellow poison takes its fatal effect after about a mile's run. The flesh around the spot where the arrow has entered turns black; it is cut out and thrown away.

Blue bulls, bisons, deer of all kinds, pigs, even panthers and tigers, succumb to the fatal strength of this poison. Usually these animals die after running a mere furlong.

#### (k) Other Weapons

We may also consider the axe (*tangia* and *pharsa*) as a weapon of the Gond and Bhumia. No aboriginal of eastern Mandla goes to the jungle without his axe. He uses it not only in self-defence against wild beasts when they attack him, but also for hunting small animals which he surprises in the jungle or on the field. He shows much skill in throwing his axe at his prey from a short distance.

Spears too are used for hunting, but only here and there. The iron spearhead (*barchi*) is similar to a ploughshare, but flat. It is fixed into its shaft in the same manner as the spike of the digging stick (*khanta*).

#### (l) The Carrier Pole

Bhumia and Gond, like the other tribes of the district, scarcely ever use a bullock-cart for transport. Most of the loads are carried either on the backs of bullocks or by men and women. While women carry their burden on the head, the men carry it on the shoulders.

To carry loads more easily, they often use the carrier pole (*kawar*). It consists of a stout pole of bamboo or *dhaman* wood (*Grewia latifolia*) about six feet long. This pole is placed across the shoulders while the load is divided into two equal parts and hung from both ends of the pole, either on ropes or in baskets. The net of ropes in which the baskets hang is called *sikka*. Any load may be carried in this manner: grain, goods bought in the market, even bricks. Up to a hundred pounds can easily be carried by a man, even if he has to walk some distance.

For heavier loads, a composite carrier pole is used. This

pole consists of two unequal pieces of bamboo. One side of each is levelled off and the shorter is placed alongside the larger one to which it is fastened securely either with bark or hemp ropes or with leather strips. This combination of two poles prevents the carrier pole from breaking when the load is heavy. By joining two poles together in this manner the carrier pole also becomes more elastic.

The carrier does not walk slowly, but moves at a quick pace. He walks with light steps and with slightly bended knees, the pole of flexible wood accommodating itself to the carrier's step by spring-like swinging movements which make the carrying easier.

If the load is too heavy for one man, it is carried by two. They place the load in a rope netting, hang it in the centre of the carrier pole and, walking one behind the other, carry it on the shoulders.

The *kawar* pole is not used by women; they cannot carry such heavy loads anyway. It is said that the Bhunia and Gond do not use the carrier pole as much as in former times. The Kol are the best carriers; they may carry forty to forty-four bricks in one load.

It would be interesting to find out in what area and by what castes the carrier pole is used. Further west of Mandla it is more or less unknown, and used only by members of certain castes who carry Ganges water. In Bombay State, sellers of milk and clarified butter (*ghee*) use the carrier pole.

When carrying grass or faggots for fuel, the Gond and Bhunia use a carrier resembling a sledge: two slightly curved planks between which a bamboo mat is fixed. This carrier is packed with grass or faggots and carried on the back.

### (m) *The Rain Hood*

For protection against the rain, both men and women wear in the rainy season a rain hood (*khumri*) which they make themselves. It has the shape of a flat conical hat with a very broad rim. Its diameter is three to five feet. The inner frame is made first. Thin long bamboo slivers are interlaced at a sixty degrees' angle into a loosely plaited wickerwork which is covered with two or three layers of *mohlain* leaves (*Bauhinia*



*vahlii*). Then an outer frame of identical shape and pattern is fitted on the inner frame with the layers of leaves in between. The rims of both frames are then plaited together to keep the leaves in place. Such a hat is almost water-tight and covers the wearer even if he stoops low when at work in the field.

During the monsoon few Gond and Bhumia walk about without the rain hood, and when they are not actually wearing it on the head, they hold it in their hand by a sling fastened to the rim of the hood or carry it on a stick which they hold over the shoulder.

It is interesting to note that the Dhulia or Basor, the professional basket makers of Mandla District, do not make rain hoods. Non-tribal people, too, when they want a rain hood, ask Gond or Bhumia to make one for them. This seems to suggest that the rain hood is a cultural element of the Gond and Bhumia, not of the non-tribal people of eastern Mandla. It is also interesting to find that Gond and Bhumia make these rain hoods equally well, and it does not appear that either of these two tribes learned to make them from the other. In Central India, the Gond and Bhumia are the westernmost tribes that use the rain hood. Further west, this very useful protection against the monsoon rains is unknown. But we find it again in districts on the west coast.

#### 4. THE HEARTH-FIRE

The fireplace in any house of eastern Mandla is in the corner farthest from the door, because it should not be approached by any outsider, particularly if he belongs to a different caste. The hearth is a mud structure in the shape of a horse-shoe, about a foot in height. It is called *chulha*. A fire is always kept burning; when no cooking is being done, it is covered with ashes. Only for a prolonged absence from the house of the whole family is the heart-fire allowed to go out. After they return, fire can always be obtained from a neighbour.

When the men go to their fields, they always take a piece of smouldering dung-cake along in order to have fire when they want to smoke.

Of a winter's evening, they light a fire in the courtyard, in the watching hut on the field or on the threshing floor. People like to sit around a fire and chat till it is time to go to sleep. As wood is abundant so near the jungle and does not cost anything, usually two or three heavy logs are kept burning placed in such a way that the burning ends meet at different angles. Before all go to sleep, they cover the fire with mud or pour water over it.

All men carry with them a flint, called *chakmak*, for striking fire. The flint is always kept in the pocket together with the dry shell of the *Bel* fruit (*Aegle marmelos*), a creeper, filled with silk cotton [the wool in the seed container of the *Semar* tree (*Bombax malabaricum*)]. The silk cotton must be taken from the seed while it is still green. The shell of the *Bel* fruit in which the cotton is kept is covered with leather, often with the strutum of a deer or goat. A piece of steel is attached to the shell by a chain. Holding the flint between thumb and index-finger of the same hand, the man strikes the flint with the piece of steel in his other hand and catches the spark with the spunk.

Children, and sometimes men when they have no *chakmak* at hand, make fire by means of the fire-drill. They search for a piece of hard dry bamboo, *potar*, *baranga* or other wood, and cut off a sliver about a foot long. In the middle of the sliver they make a cut with the axe and another one (a narrow pointed one) at the end of the sliver. Then taking a tapered stick of the same kind of wood, they set the top of it into the groove made by the cut in the middle of the sliver, near the narrow cut at the edge. Beneath the cut at the edge they place a piece of rag or dry cotton wool. Then taking the stick between the palms of both hands, they begin to drill as fast as they can. After a short while a spark falls on the cloth or cotton beneath, through the cut at the edge of the sliver. By blowing on the spark they soon kindle a fire. This fire-drill can, of course, be used only in the dry season.

Gond and Bhumia also know the use of the fire-saw. But the fire-drill is more common.

For light, the Gond and Bhumia generally use a small earthen bowl, filled with oil. A twisted cotton wick soaking



in the oil is lighted and gives a dim light. The lamp is called *diya*. Such a lamp is lighted at all religious ceremonies. Instead of oil, clarified butter (*ghee*) may be used on such occasions.

## CHAPTER III

### DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

#### 1. CLOTHING

##### (a) Male Attire

OF ALL the aboriginal tribes in the district, the Bhumia are the most scantily dressed. Their main clothing consists of a loincloth, called *languti*. The shortest loincloth is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cubits (*hath*) long and less than a foot broad. It is drawn between the legs and tucked in in front and at the back under a waist-string. At the back it is kept in a bunch between the buttocks, but in front the end hangs from the waist in a broad flap almost down to the knees. This same short loincloth is also worn by poor Gond, as well as by other aboriginals of the district.

While the *languti* is still the common dress of the Bhumia males, a few Bhumia, but more Gond, wear a longer strip of cloth which is wrapped around the waist. One end is drawn between the legs and tucked in under the wrapping at the back, while the other end in front hangs down like an apron.

Some Bhumia and a great number of Gond nowadays wear a loincloth in the fashion of the non-tribal people. But even this loincloth, called *dhoti*, is usually short and scarcely reaches to the knees.

Few Bhumia wear a shirt. They wrap a sheet, about six cubits long and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cubits broad, around their chest and shoulders. Often this sheet, called *pichauni*, is wrapped around the body below the waist, while chest and shoulders are left bare. It is taken off while working in the field. The Gond usually dress in the same manner, but many have begun to wear shirts, or at least a tight-fitting short waistcoat (jacket) which leaves the arms bare or covers them only up to the elbows.

At home and in the village, Bhumia and Gond rarely wear a head-cover; at the most they wrap a piece of old cloth around



the head, leaving the middle of the skull bare. The turban (*pagri*), when they wear it at all, is always rather carelessly wrapped around the head. The Gond, however, seem to attach more importance to a neatly arranged head-dress.

Since neither Gond nor Bhumia spin or weave, they must buy their clothes from the Panka or Mehra weaving castes. Both Bhumia and Gond prefer unbleached handwoven cloth, except for the jacket, which is often of mill-woven black or red cloth, and sometimes of silk.

Boys up to the age of five do not wear much clothing. They tie a small piece of rag over their private parts, scarcely bigger than a hand. Girls do the same even at an earlier age. This piece of cloth is held in position by a string which passes between the buttocks, and is tied to the waist-string in front and at the back.

Older boys and girls wear a short strip of cloth like a *languti*. It seems that aboriginal children begin earlier than the children of non-tribals to cover their private parts.

Neither men nor women wear shoes. They say that by wearing shoes their feet would get soft and they would no longer be able to walk barefoot. Indeed, on the hill-paths and in the monsoon, shoes would only be a hindrance. Walking barefoot all the time makes the soles of their feet so hard that small thorns do not pierce the skin. Some Bhumia and Gond occasionally wear shoes, but they do not seem to be comfortable in them.

In the monsoon and in the cold weather, Bhumia and Gond often wear as an additional cover a rough, dark-brown blanket, woven of sheep-wool. This blanket, called *komal* or *kamra*, is tied in a knot under the chin. With a rain hood on the head, and a blanket over the back, they are well protected against the rain, and at the same time have their hands free for work. The blankets are bought ready-made from the Gareriya shepherds who spin the wool of their sheep and goats and weave it into rough blankets of dark-brown colour.

#### (b) Dress of the Bhumia Women

The main garment of the Bhumia women is called *dhoti* or *lagra*. It covers the body from the waist to the knees. The

*lugra* is a long strip of cloth about three feet wide which, for dressing, is folded into two unequal portions. Beginning from the back, the women sling the folded cloth tightly once around the body. The doubled end hangs down in a triangle at the back just over the buttocks. The shorter inner portion of the cloth is tucked in at the waist, while the longer outward portion is taken up from the left hip over the back of the right shoulder.<sup>1</sup> The end is then drawn over the chest and the corners are tucked in at the waist at either side of the body near the hips.

This fashion of covering the body, beginning with the doubled end at the back, is peculiar to Bhumia women who can always be easily recognized as Bhumia by the triangular flap of their *lugra* hanging down over their buttocks. When they sit down, they draw this flap forward between their legs and hold it with their thighs pressed together.

Under the *lugra* Bhumia women wear a narrow twisted strip of cloth (*chindhi*) which is passed between the legs to cover the private parts and is attached in front and at the back to the waist-string which all wear.

The *lugra* of the Bhumia women is always of unbleached cloth which soon turns into a dirty greyish yellow. It is generally of the same material as the loincloth of the Bhumia men.

Bhumia women seem to be very conservative in the fashion of arranging their *lugra*. There is a tradition that the ancestors had decreed that Bhumia women should wear only unbleached cloth to distinguish them from the women of other castes. This rule, however, does not seem to apply to men; for they may dress as they like, and some indeed have lately taken

<sup>1</sup> L. Dube, in her MS, *The Gond Woman*, a thesis submitted to the Osmania University at Hyderabad, Deccan, says that women in Chhattisgarh cross their *lugra* over the left shoulder, while women in Oriya cross it over the right shoulder. This statement does not seem quite correct. It is perhaps more exact to say that the women of castes hailing from Chattisgarh cross their *lugra* over the left shoulder, while the women of castes hailing from Oriya, cross it over the right shoulder. The women of castes whose original home is the Deccan also cover the right shoulder with the end of the *lugra* Cf. A. N. Weling (1934): p. 37.



to wearing even trousers and bright red jackets. But the *lugra* of the Bhumia women in eastern Mandla is still of unbleached cloth. At the most it might have red threads in the texture. Such a *lugra*, of cloth woven with alternately white and red yarn, is called *mungi*, while a cloth with only a few red threads along the hem is called *sailari*. This type of cloth is worn in regions with a predominantly Gond population.

In some villages on the border of Niwas *tahsil* even Bhumia women have started to wear their *lugra* in Gond fashion. There they also wear a bodice, though they still do not cover the head with the end of the *lugra*, as some Gond women do in imitation of non-tribal women.

In eastern Mandla, Bhumia women do not cover their heads, nor do they wear a bodice (*polka* or *choli*). At one place, Catholic nuns taught Bhumia girls to sew such bodices. The women wore them at night, but took them off in the morning. Bhumia women cover their breasts simply with the end of their *lugra*, and by habit draw it ever again over the breasts when the end gets disarranged.

### (c) Dress of the Gond Women

The *lugra* of the Gond women is worn in the fashion of the Maratha women of the Deccan. The strip of cloth is wrapped once around the body. Then the upper corner of one end of the sheet is tucked into the cloth in front, while its lower corner is drawn between the legs and tucked in behind. The other end of the *lugra* is drawn over the back and right shoulder after the fashion of Bhumia women. It is rarely drawn over the back of the head.

The *lugra* of the Gond women is usually of dyed mill-woven cloth. Gond women seem to be indifferent to the colour or design of the cloth.

Once they are married, Gond women who wear a bodice are supposed to cover the head with the end of the *lugra*. If they do not wear a bodice, they need the end of the *lugra* to cover the breasts. The bodice is worn generally in villages with a strong non-tribal population; there, Gond women gradually adopt the non-tribal fashion of dress, and reformers much encourage the custom of wearing a bodice and of cover-

ing the head with the end of the *lugra*.

It is perhaps allowed to draw some conclusions as to the original home-country of the Bhumia and Gond from the dress of their women, as they are in general more conservative in their style of dress than the men. The manner of arranging the *lugra* as practised by Bhumia women is found in the east of their present habitat, in Bihar mainly, and among the hill-tribes of Chota Nagpur. Gond women, on the other hand, have adopted the fashion of dress prevalent in the Deccan.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. HAIR-DRESSING

### (a) Of Men

In older times at least, the Bhumia wore their hair long. They held it together with a bamboo strip tied around the head. Now most of the Bhumia have their heads shaved, except the crown, as big as a hand. A bunch of hair about six inches long (*chunti*) is left uncut. It is worn loose and is rarely combed. Old Bhumia—not Gond—sometimes shave only a portion of the head, in half-moon form, over the forehead, while the hair at the back of the head is allowed to grow down to the neck. At the neck it is cut short with scissors. As a rule the hair is first cut short with scissors; then the head is shaved, leaving the skull-lock at the back of the head. This skull-lock is sometimes allowed to grow very long. I have seen a skull-lock more than a yard long. But usually it is not longer than six inches. The Gond, however, prefer a very short scalp-lock. After the hair is cut, it is thrown away or collected by women who spin it into a string (*phulera*) with which to tie up their own hair in a knot at the back of the head.

Gond and Bhumia do not grow beards, but shave the face, except for a tiny moustache. As their growth of beard is very slight, they need a shave only once a month. Beards are trimmed either with scissors (*katharni* or *kainchi*) or shaved with a razor (*churi*). Scissors and razors are bought in the

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. S. Ghurye (1951): pp. 83, 182 f.; S. C. Roy (1937): Vol. 2, Ill. 33, 34, 42; S. C. Roy (1915): Ill. facing pp. 294 and 297; S. C. Roy (1912): p. 365.



market; usually three or four families share a razor between them.

The aboriginal tribes of eastern Mandla in general do not ordinarily employ non-tribal barbers (*nai*), nor do they have barbers of their own caste. They do this service for each other without demanding any payment. Neighbours shave each other, but not if they are relatives.

Before a shave they simply wet the face with water. They do not use shaving soap. They usually shave with the help of a small mirror which can be found in every house, and is sometimes carried in the fold of the turban. The hair in the armpits is shaved off each time the beard is shaved.

Though most men have combs, they apparently do not use them every day. The hair is cleaned, once in a while, with water or oil (*guli ka tel*); after cleaning it, some rub copra-oil into it. When the hair is combed, it is parted in the middle of the forehead. The comb which Gond and Bhumia use is an ordinary wooden comb which can be had at the shop in the market. Gond and Bhumia do not make their own combs.

#### (b) Of Women

The fashion of hair-dress is the same among Bhumia and Gond women. They rarely wear their hair loose. Usually the hair is parted in the middle of the forehead and tied with a string close to the back of the head. Then the loose bunch of the hair is taken, wound up and tied down with the same string in a tight neat knot at the back of the head. This hair string (*phundara*) is generally a red cotton string with red, green or blue tassels at the ends. The hair string is tied in such a manner that the tassels come to rest on the top of the hair knot.

The hair of the Gond and Bhumia women does not usually grow long, probably because it is tied so tightly at the back of the head and is never properly combed. It is of dark-brown colour and quite often curly.

Before reaching maturity, a girl uses her mother's comb. She is not entitled to a comb of her own. When she grows up and a boy falls in love with her, he invites her to go with him to the market. There each buys a comb for the other.

After using the combs for a few days they exchange them. When the parents of the girl see that their daughter has a comb of her own, sticking in the knot of her hair or dangling on a string tied around the knot, they know that the girl is in love with a young man. The lovers exchange their combs every third or fourth day.<sup>3</sup>

During the days of menstruation, no woman will comb her hair; for the women are afraid lest some witch or sorcerer should get hold of the hair combed out and bewitch them. During menstruation they believe they are particularly susceptible to witchcraft. At other times, when they comb their hair, they carefully collect all the hair which has dropped out, dig a hole in the ground and bury it. Women should not throw their hair into the fire; for God (*Bhagwan*) is present in the fire. Nor should they comb their hair in the evening just before sunset, because at that time *Bhagwan* is supposed to eat his dinner. If the hair combed out by a woman should fall into his plate, he would get very angry and ruin such a careless woman's whole future.

Bhumia and Gond women do not allow hair to grow in their armpits and in the pubic region. They collect some dry leaves and twigs of the *Aura* tree (*Embllica officinalis*), burn them and collect the ashes. In the evening they bring these home, apply them to the portion of the body from which they want to remove the hair and pull the hairs out. The same custom is found among high-caste non-tribal women of Mandla District. The latter often mix mustard seed (*rai*) with the ashes.

### Cleanliness

In matters of personal cleanliness, the Bhumia are certainly less fastidious than the Gond. But where they live in close contact with the Gond or non-tribal people, they are cleaner, and also anxious to wear more and cleaner clothes. They admit, however, that they were rather careless in former times as to their dress. Many women wore nothing better than rags.

One Bhumia informant maintained that he washes his face

<sup>3</sup> Similar customs prevail among the primitive tribes of South India. Cf. L. A. Krishna Iyer (1927), p. 328 f.



every morning after getting up. When he returns from work in the field he takes a bath. In the evening he washes his feet. He admitted, however, that not every Bhumia bathed so often. In the monsoon, the Bhumia and Gond sometimes take a bath in a river or pond (*nala*) during a pause in the work at noon. In the hot season they go to a nearby river or pond to bathe.

After bathing, they always wash their clothes. But generally washing is a woman's task. When a woman washes her own clothes, she also cleans those of her husband and of other male relatives staying with the family. But she may not wash the clothes of a person not belonging to the family. It is unbecoming for a man to wash the clothes of a woman.

Washing is done either with cold or hot water into which they drop a handful of ashes. Instead of ashes they also use the thorns of the *barora* shrub. After the laundry has been boiled for a while, it is taken out, wrung out and taken to the river where it is washed again. But the laundry is not beaten on a stone or with a piece of wood after the fashion of the non-tribal washermen. One informant told me that by such methods the clothes would wear out too soon.

During the rainy season clothes must be washed oftener.

Gond and Bhumia clean their teeth with a twig of the *nim* tree (*Azadirachta indica*) or any other tree. The end of the twig is bitten to a brush. It is called *datun*.

### 3. ORNAMENTS

#### (a) For Men

As ornaments, Gond and Bhumia men wear tin or silver bracelets, one on each wrist, called *chura*.

On the third or little finger of either hand they sometimes wear a ring of silver or brass. It is called *mundri*.

In their ears, they wear rings, i.e. *bari*, in the upper part of the ear; the *bala*, piercing the middle ear; and the *lurki*, through the lobe.

Bhumia men do not wear ankle rings; but they as well as Gond men put a single ring on the big toe of either foot. It is called *chutka*.

Only Bhumia men wear a necklace of glass-pearls which is called *guriya*. The pearls are arranged to represent a snake. There is a large black pearl in the centre, while above and below it there are several rows of variedly coloured beads, red and white alternately, held together in a broad band by strings. After the rows of white and red beads follow longer but fewer rows of blue or green and black beads and then again a few rows of white and red beads. The necklace, broadest in the middle and thinning out towards the ends is tied at the back of the neck. One end of the string is tied in a sling, the mouth of the snake; the other end is open and represents the snake's tail. The white and red beads represent the white and red stripes on the blue or black body of the snake.

The glass beads, except the red ones which are berries of some jungle plant, are bought in the market. Men of the Jogi caste sell them there.

#### (b) For Women

Many Gond and Bhumia women wear a necklace of rupee or eight-anna pieces, linked into a chain by thin silver chains, or simply by a string drawn through a loop attached to each coin. A necklace of rupees is called *bawal*; one consisting of eight-anna pieces (with Arabic letters on them) is called *Nagpuria hamel*. Some women wear two or even more such necklaces.

They also wear the *hasli*, a silver neck-ring in the shape of a snake, with one end hooked into the other at the back of the neck.

Another neck-ring is the so-called *chandi ka sutiya*, a necklet about as thick as a finger but thinner towards the ends. It is of silver or baser metal. Silver *sutiya* are elastic, those of other metals are not and break easily.

Only Bhumia women wear the *guriya*, a necklace of red and black glass beads, either several rows of pearls sewn together on a strip of cloth with a large bead in the middle, or single strings of beads. Another necklace of variously coloured beads is called *latka*.

All Gond and Bhumia women have their ears pierced at



various places. They wear in the lobe at least the *pola*, a thick round piece of wood to keep the hole in the lobe open, when no ornament is worn. The common ear ornament is called *dhar* (shield), a large circular silver ornament. To take its weight off the ear-lobe, a thin silver chain is attached to it and slung over the ear. Gond women often wear a smaller stud of flower-like design instead of a *dhar*. There is no chain attached to this ornament.

In the upper ear Gond women sometimes wear an ornament in the shape of a marigold, called *genda*.

An ornament worn in the hair over the forehead is the so-called *bindia*. It consists of two broad silver chains or bands, reaching from the middle of the head down to the temples. The centre of the *bindia* is adorned with another ornament representing a custard apple. It is called *bija* and is always of the same material as the *bindia*. This latter form of the *bindia* is a popular ornament among the Kurmi women, while high-caste women wear the image of a cobra (*shesh-nag*) instead of the *bija*.

Bhumia women do not wear any nose ornaments, while Gond women often wear in the nose a small flower-like stud which is called *kutya* or *laong* (because it resembles clove).

On the wrists, both Gond and Bhumia women sometimes wear glass bangles (*churi*) or silver bracelets (*gujri*); at the elbow the *bahota*. Their toes are decorated with one or two brass rings, usually one on the big toe (*chutka*) and one on the third toe (*chutki*). These rings which are of silver or any other metal are usually just pieces of spiralled wire. Sometimes the women wear toe ornaments with a high projecting knob on three toes, the three rings representing a scorpion (*bichhu*), hence their name *bichha*. The ring on the big toe stands for the head of the scorpion, the knobs on the rings of the middle toes for the joints of its tail.

At a village more in the interior (at Junwani) I saw several Gond women with brass leg ornaments, heavy broad brass bands with upturned edges. They are called *chura*. Each woman wore several of these on each leg<sup>4</sup>. Elsewhere

<sup>4</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916, Vol. 2, p. 35) say that these leg ornaments are especially popular among the Ahir (Rawat) women from

curved ankle rings of silver or pewter (*kāra*) are worn, fitted comfortably to the shape of the ankle, higher in front, lower at the heel.

While generally all women are fond of wearing jewels and ornaments, their husbands or parents usually find it difficult to present them with such. Their financial position in most cases is so bad that they can ill afford to buy costly ornaments. A married woman may have to ask her husband repeatedly and urgently to buy her one of the cheap ornaments. She can usually persuade him to buy such ornaments when he wishes to make up after a quarrel, or to pacify her if she finds out that he is carrying on an intrigue with another woman. Expensive ornaments which a woman displays are a sign of wealth and give social prestige. Some men would rather buy ornaments for their wives to show off than buy much-needed bullocks for work. A woman's ornaments are family property; she has no personal right over them and may not sell them or give them away unless they have been given her as personal wedding presents (*kamori*).

All the ornaments which Bhumia and Gond women wear except the *guriya*, are common among the non-tribal women of Central India and the Deccan. There is no doubt that the Bhumia and Gond adopted them from the Hindu castes.

### *Tattooing*

The men among the aboriginals of eastern Mandla wear only a few tattoo marks on the outer sides of their legs at knee-level and sometimes on the upper arms. Nowadays some Gond follow the common usage of the non-tribals of having their names tattooed on their forearms.

Gond and Bhumia women, however, are conspicuous for their tattooing over a large part of the body. The patterns are always the same, but different for Gond and Bhumia women. Apart from the peculiar fashion of dress, this makes

whom the other tribes may have adopted them. They consist of a 'long cylinder which fits closely to the leg, being made in two halves which lock into each other, while at each end and in the centre circular plates project outwards horizontally.' The Bhil women too are fond of these ornaments.



it easy to distinguish the Bhumia women from any other tribe or caste of the district. While Gond women prefer stars, crosses, and crude figures of men and animals as tattoo marks, the Bhumia women fancy long straight or curved lines. These lines are often several inches long and about a quarter-inch thick.

A Gond or Bhumia girl is first tattooed when she is only a few years old: on the forehead and temples, and on the right cheek. The pattern is the same for both tribes: on the forehead just above the nose the figure of the hearth in horse-shoe form, with the open side pointing downwards, with a dot on each side and one below. This tattoo mark is called *chulwa*, i.e. the hearth, and is a symbol of the girl's future household duties. The tattoo marks on the temples and on the right cheek (*dipa*) consist of several lines and dots. They are applied at the same time or a little later. When a girl reaches puberty, she is tattooed on the arms, chest and shoulders. Later, just before or after marriage, she may also be tattooed on the back of her legs, from the knees to the ankles, and on the thighs.

While all women display the same tattoo marks on forehead, temples and right cheek, their chest and shoulders as well as arms and legs are not always tattooed. Either the parents of the girl cannot afford to pay the expenses for the tattooing, or the girls themselves do not want it; for the operation is painful. Girls of a dark complexion, moreover, do not see much sense in tattooing, as the marks are scarcely visible on a dark skin. Tattoo marks show off best on a pale skin. Dark-complexioned girls, therefore, worry their parents and husbands more for silver ornaments which are more becoming to a dusky beauty.

The tattoo marks are applied by professional tattooers (*badnin*), women of the Badna caste, who also prepare the ink. It is a mixture of the juice of the *bhilawan* tree (*Semexarpus anacardium*) and of soot. The skin is pricked with a needle and the juice rubbed into the wounds. It causes painful swellings for some days. Tattooing should not be applied during the monsoon because of increased danger of infection.

The reason why this painful operation is performed may originally have been a magical one. But in present times neither Gond nor Bhumia are aware of it. They let themselves be tattooed because it is the custom of their tribe, and also to make themselves more attractive. A Bhumia told me that Bhumia women when they die would not be able to show any beauty on their bodies. They let themselves be tattooed to show *Bhagwan* something which will please him. Another motive for tattooing is social ambition. Tattoo marks on a large part of the body prove that a girl's parents must be wealthy or must have loved their daughter very much. Both alternatives would increase her social prestige.



## CHAPTER IV

### FOOD AND MEALS

#### 1. CEREALS

GOND and Bhumia generally eat three times a day: first at about 11 a.m., (*murgal*), the second time at 4 p.m. (*marria*), and the third time at about 9 p.m. (*biyari*). In the monsoon the order is changed; then they eat early in the morning, at noon, and late in the evening. The meal times are changed because of the different hours of work.

In the morning, they usually eat a gruel of *kodai* or *kutki* (*pej*), the same at noon or in the afternoon, while in the evening they prefer a dish of boiled rice or *kodai*, but dry (*bhat*). They eat it with vegetables (*bhajri*).

The diet of the Gond and Bhumia is monotonous in the extreme: most days of the year it consists of *kodo* and *kutki* only. *Kodo* is a small millet (*Paspalum scribulatum*), and *kutki* is a smaller grain of the same species (*Panicum miliaceum*). *Kutki* is considered a richer food than *kodo* which, on the other hand, is more easily digested.

*Kodo* or *kutki* is prepared in two ways: it is husked and then boiled to a broth which is called *pej*. If the grain is boiled till the water has evaporated, it is called *bhat*. Husked *kodo* is called *kodai*.

A grown-up man eats in one meal as much *kodai* as two hands can hold. A family of five persons requires about ten *khandi* (1 *khandi* = 100 seers) of grain a year. In a boarding school at Dullopur near Dindori the daily ration for 45 boys was four *kuru* (= 20 seers) of *kodo*, two *kuru* (10 seers) of wheat and one *kuru* of pulse.

While *kodo* and *kutki* are their mainstay, the Gond and Bhumia vary their usual diet sometimes by a dish of rice. They even prefer rice to *kodo* or *kutki*, but cannot often afford it; for their fields are mostly too poor for rice cultivation.

Rice is a feast-day dish. It is prepared in the same manner as *kodo* or *kutki*, and eaten as *pej* or *bhat*. When it is boiled with pulse (*dar*) or other grains, it is called *khichri*. Rice boiled in milk and sugar is called *khir*.

*Kodai* is sometimes ground to flour and baked on an iron plate (*thali*) over the fire to a flat cake, which is called *godala*. Similar cakes of wheat flour baked in oil are called *sohari*. If the Gond and Bhumia have the choice between wheat cakes or *kodai* cakes, they prefer *kodai* cakes.

Flat cakes of *juar* (*Andropogon sorghum*), a millet, are sometimes made as a change of diet at noon or for dinner. These cakes are eaten with pulse or vegetables. But *juar* bread is even less relished than wheat bread. *Juar* is grown in very small quantities.

At times of scarcity, the dry flowers of *mahua* are mixed into the gruel. The flowers of the *mahua* tree (*Bassia latifolia*) are collected in the early morning during the hot season by women and children, dried in the sun and stored in baskets. They are mixed into the *kodai* or *kutki* gruel, though sometimes the Bhumia and Gond eat them raw or roasted. Of course, the greater portion of the collected *mahua* flowers is used for the distillation of liquor.

Cakes of wheat or *juar* flour are sometimes baked in oil; the oil used for this purpose is either *ramtila* (*Guzotia abyssinica*) or *til* (sesame, *Sesamum indicum*) oil. Both crops are grown in eastern Mandla and the oil is pressed by the Gond and Bhumia with a crude hand-press.

## 2. VEGETABLES

The jungle provides Gond and Bhumia with a rich supply of vegetables which are eaten with the cereals. Among these are *bhari* and *jhej*, which are grown in the garden; they must be cooked in *khattai*, a kind of pickle or *chatni*. Then there is *khotna* and *jarota* (*Cassia obtusifolia*); these are eaten only if no other vegetables are available. They too are cooked in *khattai*. The aboriginals also relish the leaves of the *bohar* tree. The leaves of gram (*channa*) are plucked when green; the tops of the *channa* bushes are plucked before flowering to



increase the number of flowers.

Other vegetables are boiled in water or, like wild *khajra* and *kachera*, cooked in *khattai*. Further *beti*, a kind of creeper (*beli*), and pumpkins like *kalindar* are a welcome addition to the ordinary dish of *kodai* or *kutki*. The aborigines cook as vegetables also the leaves of *rariwa*, *dorai*, *chinch* (*Corchorus olitorius*), *chakaora* (*Cassia tora*), *pipar* (*Ficus religiosa*), *koilar*, *phang bhaji* (*Rivea hypocrateri formis*), *kawa keni*, *pakhri* (*Ficus infectoria*), the flowers of *birhol* (*Indigofera pulchella*). The flowers of *kachnar* (*Bauhinia purpurea*) are cut and boiled, its seeds are roasted.

The fruits of the *amli* tree (*Tamarindus indica*) are boiled either with *kodai* or gram flour, or eaten with fish. The fruits of the *mango* tree, before they are eaten, are peeled and cut into small pieces. *Mango* fruits when still green are pared, the stone taken out and the flesh put into a pot to boil. When the fruits are ripe, they are eaten uncooked. *Jamun* fruits (*Eugenia jambolana*) are eaten when ripe. The stones are thrown away. Green *char* fruits (*Trewia nudiflora*—Linn tree) are like figs. They are eaten when ripe.

In May, the people collect *khameri* fruits (*Gmelina arborea*) while they are still green. The fruits by being exposed to the sun for a day are allowed to rot. In the evening they are collected, pressed and squeezed by hand or with a flat slab of wood till they get black. A second time, they are exposed to the sun for a whole day. In the evening the fruits are opened, the juice is pressed out, the stones are removed and thrown away. A third time, the skins of the fruits are dried in the sun. When they are quite dry, they are collected in baskets and can thus be stored for several months. To prepare them for a meal, they are first boiled for a whole day, then in the evening they are eaten with *kodai* gruel. The fruits of *khameri* are also eaten when quite ripe, but people seem to prefer them plucked when still green and prepared in the manner described above.

*Tendu* fruits (*Diospyros tomentosa*) are eaten when ripe. The fruits are boiled before the meal. The Gond and Bhumia also relish the fruits of *mohlain* (*Bauhinia vahlii*), *bar* (*Ficus indica*), *bel* (*Aegle marmelos*), and the leaves of *bohar*

(*Cordia myxa*), though not its fruits.

The *mahua* (*Bassia latifolia*) is the most valuable fruit tree because its flowers, fruits and seeds can be used for food. It flowers in May. Early in the morning the women and children go and collect the sweetly smelling blossoms and gather them in baskets. At home they dry them in the sun, then store them in bins for use as food or to distil them into liquor. For a meal the flowers are roasted in a broken pot over a fire, often together with *ramtila* seeds. This mixture is then pounded with the grain-pestle into flour. It is called *lata*. It is eaten dry or boiled in water till the water evaporates. Then it is eaten with the *kodai* gruel as a side dish. From the seeds they press oil, while the fruits are eaten when ripe.

Sour pickle (*khattai*) is prepared in the following manner: Water is heated in a clay pot till it boils. Then another smaller clay pot is placed over the mouth of the pot containing the boiling water. The smaller pot is full of *kodai*. The *kodai* has previously been washed three or four times. For each member of the family about three handfuls of *kodai* are poured into the pot. At its bottom is a small hole. Now both pots are covered with a rag so that the vapour of the boiling water must pass into the *kodai* through the hole at the bottom of the upper pot. For an hour the grain is thus exposed to the hot vapour. Then the *kodai* is pressed with a wooden spoon (*chatwa*) through the small hole into the lower pot which contains the boiling water. It is stirred well till it is thoroughly boiled. Then a sieve (*passeni*) is placed over the mouth of the pot, and the water in which the *kodai* was boiled is poured into a bamboo basket so tightly plaited that it is waterproof (*dauri*). This water is now called *passia*. After a while, when it has cooled down, the water is poured into another earthen pot. The mouth of the pot is covered with an earthen lid. After three or four days the water in the pot gets sour. Then it is ready for use. It is called *khanji* or *khattai*, i.e. sour. The *khattai* is added with salt and spices as a condiment to the water in which vegetables (*bhaji*) are cooked. It is also added as a condiment to the *kodai* gruel (*pej*). *Khattai* is prepared by every housewife of eastern Mandla. It is, however, not at all a speciality of the Gond or Bhumia. It is a common condiment



of all the castes of Central India and the Deccan. The only difference is that they use rice instead of *kodai* in preparing it.

### 3. ROOTS AND TUBERS

Roots and tubers are occasionally collected and prepared for food, especially when there is a scarcity of grain. Tubers are eaten any time of the year, but it is mainly in the cold season that the aboriginals of eastern Mandla dig for them. The season for root-digging starts in the month of *Pus* (December) and is carried through the months of *Magh*, *Phag* and *Chait* (January to March). In the hot season the soil is too hard for digging, and in the monsoon it is too muddy and sticky.

As digging for roots and tubers is hard work, the Gond and Bhumia only take to it when no other food is available. Generally it is the task of the women and girls, but if the roots lie too deeply embedded in the soil, men and boys may do the digging. Often a deep hole has to be dug in order to get at the tenderest roots. The soil then must be removed in baskets.

The usual digging implement is the so-called *kosia*, an iron spike like the common ploughshare which is stuck into the split end of a long stick and tightly tied with bark fibres. With this implement the ground is dug up around the tree and the soil removed by hand or in baskets.

People say that roots and tubers are nourishing food unless they are too young and watery. Still they prefer young and tender roots to old and tough ones.

The following roots and tubers are edible: the *kanhia kanda*, the root of a small tree; its root is deep down in the ground, white, very long and branched. The *kundru* is the root of a creeper (*Coccinia indica*); it can easily be dug out because it lies near the surface. The roots of other creepers like *kirchi*, *jhalia*, *jarungi* are also edible. The *dudhia kanda* is a tuber that is thick and juicy like an onion. Its skin is black, but its flesh is white. It is a substitute for milk, and babies are fed with it when the mother has no milk. The *lithora* is another edible tuber, with black skin and red or white flesh.

Roots and tubers are found in the jungle. But single persons rarely ever go to dig for them; it would be too dangerous. Several men of the village might go in a group, or some women. They do not go in mixed groups unless all are of the same family. Only during the flowering of the bamboo do men and women go together in large groups, because they have to walk far into the jungle where wild animals have their hunting ground. They all walk in single file, the men first and the women following.

Bamboo shoots (*bans karil*) are cut in August or September. The Forest Department has strictly forbidden to cut them, but the aborigines, when caught, bribe the forest guards by giving them a share of the shoots or a bottle of liquor to let them go unpunished. When the shoots are brought home, they are boiled and then dried. Before use, they are soaked in warm water. Bamboo shoots are delicious when they just begin to rot.

Another much relished food is bamboo seed. Bamboos flower once during their lifetime and die soon after. Their seeds resemble wheat grains in shape and colour. The jungle people flock from far to the spot where the bamboo is in flower to collect 'bamboo rice' for food. There is a common superstition that after the flowering of the bamboo, famine will follow. Bamboo seeds are boiled and prepared for food like ordinary rice.

At places where *sarai* trees (*sakua* in Hindi, *Boswellia thurifera*) grow, a tuber can be found deeply embedded in the ground which is called *putpura*. It is similar to a potato, white or brown in colour. It is eaten raw or boiled, and is quite nourishing. Sometimes the tubers are cut into slices and fried in oil and turmeric, then boiled.

Gond and Bhumia also eat various kinds of mushrooms (*pihri*). Mushrooms are boiled after they have been fried in oil; then spices, turmeric and Indian pepper (*mirchi*), are added.

### *Honey-taking*

When a bee-hive is detected in a tree, several men go to remove it. In order to protect themselves from the stinging



bees or wasps, they take the dry leaves of *lajri khakra*, a dead centipede (*saigorhia*) and a third article whose name was unknown to my informant, and mix them well. Then they divide the mixture into three portions: one portion is burned beneath the tree on which the bee-hive is hanging, the second portion is stuck into a hole in the tree or under its bark, and the third portion the man who is going to climb the tree and to remove the hive ties into his loincloth. It is believed that after this preparation the bees or wasps leave their hive and fly off without stinging anyone.

But this magic medicine must be removed from the pocket (*khisa*) of the man as soon as possible after collecting the honey, for it is apt to make him impotent, especially if he keeps it long near his navel.

The hive is divided among the men who helped in taking it. Each man carries his portion home where the honey is squeezed from the comb and eaten by the family. The wax is kept and sold when more of it has been collected.

#### 4. MEAT

The Gond and Bhumia, like most aboriginal tribes of the district, feel a strong craving for a meat diet. In former times they were free to hunt in the forest and to complement their otherwise mainly vegetarian diet with the meat of all kinds of wild animals. But the present game laws of the Government restrict hunting severely and they have either to apply for a hunting licence, which is not easy for them to procure, or to get meat in some other way. Some of course resort to poaching, but they risk severe punishment if they are caught. Others fall back on the meat of fowls, goats and pigs.

While some Gond and Baiga sub-groups, like the Bharia, eat beef, the Bhumia maintain that they have never at any time eaten beef. This is probably true, because the Bhumia did not raise cattle as long as they practised shifting-cultivation. And when they had to change over to plough cultivation, they already shared the Hindu aversion to beef-eating and the fear of social degradation which all beef-eaters incur. The Bhumia could not have had a religious objection to beef-

eating, for in the old times, when they intermarried with the Gond, they did not object to the beef-eating of the latter. Hindu reformers now try very hard to make the Bhumia also give up the habit of eating pork; they indeed succeeded with many Gond and even with some Panka, but so far not much with the Bhumia. About ten years ago the Bhumia decided in a caste meeting that they would abstain from eating pork and fowls, but after a short while they found this new regulation too hard to observe and reverted to the rearing and eating of pigs and fowls.

The Bhumia are also permitted to eat goats' meat, and the meat of all kinds of wild animals, deer, rabbits, even rats and mice. All kinds of fish may be eaten; also all birds, as peacock, green-pigeon (*haril*), wild dove (*pharki*), quail, and others. The meat of the tiger, donkey, horse, monkey and dog is forbidden. The meat of cattle and buffaloes is also forbidden. The reason which the Bhumia now offer for this restriction is the usual one brought forward by Hindus in general that these animals work for them and provide them with milk. It would be very ungrateful, they say, to kill and eat such useful animals. But why do they then make an exception of the goat? She-goats are freely eaten in spite of the fact that they, too, give milk. The Bhumia have no answer.

Gond and Bhumia eat the eggs of fowls only when a hen refuses to hatch and the eggs would otherwise get spoiled. Women, however, are never permitted to eat eggs, either of domestic fowls or of any other birds. Eggs are prepared in the following manner: The shell is broken and the contents poured on a leaf, which is then held over a fire. Eggs are eaten without salt.

The Gond along the villages of the Narbada River are as severe in their restrictions as the Bhumia. Some do not even eat pork; lately the Gond have relaxed this rule somewhat, though many are still averse to rearing pigs. When they want to eat pork, they buy a pig from the Bhumia, sacrifice it or kill it without any religious rite and eat its meat. In the southern parts of eastern Mandla, the Gond always ate beef, and those who gave it up under Hindu influence have gradually again reverted to eating beef.



Certain clans of the Gond must abstain from the meat of their totem animals, such as the tortoise, and certain subdivisions of the clans observe in addition further restrictions.

## 5. STIMULANTS AND NARCOTICS

### *Hemp and Opium*

Various drugs are extracted from the hemp plant (*Cannabis sativa*). Their use is quite general among the Hindu castes; the Gond have also started now to take drugs sometimes, but not yet the Bhumia.

The flowering tops of the hemp plant are dried and smoked as *ganja*. *Ganja* is easily obtained in the market and is smoked mixed with tobacco in a leaf pipe or in the earthen pipe. While the Gond are more addicted to this drug, which makes them drowsy and happy when they smoke it in the evening, the Bhumia smoke it perhaps once in two or three months. They buy a little in the bazaar and have one pipeful each as a treat. If the leaves of the hemp plant are chewed and boiled in water, the resulting drug is called *bhanga*. In this form it is less frequently taken by the Gond and Bhumia. More common, however, is *charas*, the resin collected from the flowers of hemp. Its drugging effect is stronger than that of *ganja* or *bhanga*.

My Bhumia informants could not tell me of any of their caste fellows who took opium (*kusumba*). Among the Gond we find more opium addicts, especially among wealthy men. They may have learned to indulge in this drug from the Rajputs who by tradition are much addicted to opium.<sup>1</sup>

### *Pan*

Betel (*pan*, *Piper betel*) is a green leaf as large as a hand and slightly bitter. It is grown by the Barai, a caste of professional betel-growers. The leaf is smeared with unslaked lime, then a few crumbs of areca nuts (*Areca catechu*) and catechu (*katha*), also musk and cardamoms are added. Then the leaf is rolled together into a cone or into a triangular

<sup>1</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, p. 423 f.

packet and fastened with a clove. Gond and Bhumia chew *pan* very occasionally; on market days perhaps, or on feast days. My informant Panga, a Bhumia, told me that he had scarcely ever tasted it.

It is, therefore, the more striking that the areca nut (*supari*) plays such an important part in the wedding ceremonial of the Gond and Bhumia. Whenever the parties of groom and bride meet, betel nuts are cut very ceremoniously and people stick the pieces into one another's mouths. During a wedding, the areca nut is almost as important as liquor. Betel is of equal importance only in the wedding ritual of South Indian castes, and to some extent also in the Deccan.<sup>2</sup> In the Munda country, east of Gondwana, the use of betel is practically unknown.<sup>3</sup>

### *Tobacco*

Tobacco is planted in the garden of every homestead in eastern Mandla. It gets ripe in the month of *Karttik* (October). Then the leaves are plucked a few inches from the ground, taken home and dried on the roof of the house for about eight days. Then they are taken down, tied in small bundles (*juri*) and stored under the roof on a *katya* (string-bed).

Gond and Bhumia do not grow tobacco for sale, but only for home consumption. They are passionate smokers. The use of tobacco is indeed a social rule.<sup>4</sup> Wherever people meet, they smoke together. If they are caste fellows, they use the same pipe, or else each caste uses its own pipe. Guests are always offered tobacco as soon as they sit down for a chat. The pipe goes continuously round in a meeting of caste

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. Thurston (1909): Vol. 6, pp. 96 ff.; A. Robertson, (1938): p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> S. Chandra Roy, (1912): p. 382.

<sup>4</sup> It is indeed remarkable that the use of tobacco has gained such importance in the social life of the Gond and Bhumia, as of other tribes and castes too in Central India, considering the fact that tobacco was first introduced into India by the Portuguese as late as the beginning of the 16th century. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, p. 320 f.; P. K. Gode (1956): pp. 65-74.



fellows, at home, or on the field when the workers stop for a short rest.

Women generally do not smoke nor chew tobacco, but old women may occasionally smoke a pipe. Men start smoking early in life. Tobacco for chewing is prepared with lime (*chuna*) and *katha* (catechu), but chewing is not as popular as smoking. The use of lime in chewing tobacco is bad for the teeth; it eats off the enamel. Many old Gond and Bhumia have had teeth because they indulged in chewing tobacco. Nowadays, many aboriginals have taken to smoking the country cigars, the so-called biri.

Home-grown tobacco is smoked either in a clay pipe (*chilam*) or in a pipe formed by rolling a leaf together. The leaf is taken from a *mango* or *sarai* tree. It is called *chungi*. A leaf pipe is always carried along by the men, stuck behind the ear or in the folds of the turban. A leaf pipe can be used about three times, then it is burned down and thrown away. A Gond may smoke a clay pipe with a Bhumia, but not a leaf pipe.

### Liquor

For the Gond and Bhumia, liquor which is distilled from the corollae of the *mahua* tree (*Bassia latifolia*) is not only a welcome stimulant, but also an important ingredient in their religious and social ritual. It is essential for every offering; it is consumed in large quantities at weddings and funeral feasts; it is indispensable at caste dinners. There is no real feast-day without a drink.

Before the Gond and Bhumia drink, they sprinkle a few drops on the ground, the Bhumia for *Burha Nang* (King of the Snakes) and *Nanga Baiga* (their ancestor), the Gond for their ancestors. But nowadays many people omit this rite. On Diwali, in the month of *Karttik* (October), Gond and Bhumia pour a full cup of liquor (*daru*) on the ground with the prayer: 'Ancestors, drink.' All male members of the family offer this libation. After that they too have a drink.

It appears, however, that quite apart from this religious and social importance of alcohol, the aboriginals of eastern Mandla feel also a physical need for a stimulant. They seem to be

unable to rise to the required festive mood without the stimulant of liquor. For any mental activity, for the recitation of a story, for a song, even for a dance, they require a drink. Without a drink the ordinary aboriginal is rather dull and quiet. But with half a bottle of liquor in his stomach, he changes into another man and becomes lively, loquacious, merry and even artistic. A few, of course, become quarrelsome or melancholy.

People say that they do not relish the taste of liquor on their tongue, and therefore take it in large gulps. But even if liquor does not taste good, it warms the stomach, enlivens conversation, gives courage and merriment, it loosens the tongue and quickens the limbs for a dance.

However, the habitual and large consumption of liquor is certainly no sign of a strong vitality. That the Gond and Bhumia feel the necessity for such artificial stimulants is proof that their vitality, their health and vigour are incapable of raising them above the everyday worries and troubles. They drink, and begin to drink more and more, to escape the drabness and monotony of life. However, habitual drunkards are still rare, at least among the Bhumia. They, too, get gloriously drunk at certain occasions, but they do not drink daily and habitually, as some Gond do. Of course, few Bhumia could afford it. But it is a bad sign that many wealthy Gond who can afford it are habitual drunkards.

The Gond and Bhumia drink liquor from a leaf cup or from the palm of the hand, rarely straight from the bottle and never from a glass. Liquor can be accepted from a member of any caste, even from a sweeper. When they drink, they always do it on an empty stomach. Only when the last bottle has been emptied, will they begin with their meal. They never touch liquor after a meal.

In the Mandla District, a bottle of liquor is comparatively cheap; it costs only about eight annas. Distillation is controlled by the Excise Department which collects a good amount of revenue from the sale of liquor. To prevent illicit traffic from one district to another where liquor might be more expensive, it has a different colour in each district. The aboriginals complain that Government-distilled liquor is not strong



enough: it requires at least half a bottle to feel a little warmth. If a man wants to get drunk, he must drink a full bottle or even more.

Illicit distillation is widespread, but only at certain times. In the wedding season, and for occasions when large quantities of liquor are required, they distil their own liquor at less cost and of better quality. At the time of the picking of *mahua* flowers, the temptation is too great and nearly every one in eastern Mandla distils his own liquor. At such times one can see a slender pillar of smoke rising in the seclusion of the jungle, at an almost inaccessible spot. There, a Gond or Bhumia has his primitive distilling apparatus over a slow fire.

There is no evidence that *mahua* liquor is responsible for many of the major crimes that are perpetrated in the district. It is true that particularly the Bhumia soon get quarrelsome under the influence of alcohol. But they can easily be pacified by offering them another helping. It appears that more quarrels are started by Gond reformers who attempt to wean their caste fellows from drinking.

There is more justification in the charge that alcohol impoverishes the aboriginals. This is evident from the fact that most owners of liquor shops (*kalal*) grow rich. There are also quite a number of cases known of habitual drunkards who have lost their whole wealth at the liquor shop.

So far an enlightened Government has not yet introduced prohibition in eastern Mandla. In my opinion it would not be wise to do it. The aboriginals cannot be weaned from the drinking habit by regimentation. The evil must be attacked at the root. The general living standard of the aboriginals must be improved and their vitality strengthened: only then will they give up drinking without much outside pressure. As long as their living conditions are not substantially improved, the aboriginals should not be deprived of this source of pleasure. If alcohol is taken away from them, life would become very drab and monotonous for them. They would cease singing and dancing; they would have nothing to bring them into a festive mood on various occasions; they would slowly but surely sink back into lethargy and despair. A man who enjoys

the blessings of culture and civilization, who is mentally alert and active, may not need such artificial stimulants. But as long as the aboriginals are barred from these things, they cannot live without alcoholic drinks.

On the day when victory was celebrated in 1945, the Government distributed at Dindori and at other places sweets for the children and liquor for the adults. Many got drunk on this day and celebrated victory by drinking heavily. Though the aboriginals had only a hazy idea about the reason for this celebration, they will not quickly forget the day when the Government gave them a free drink.



## CHAPTER V

### CULTIVATION

#### 1. LAND ADMINISTRATION IN EASTERN MANDLA

IN ORDER to assess rightly the situation of the jungle people as cultivators, we must take into consideration the various ways by which land was and is administered by the Indian Government.

The eastern part of Mandla District in which Gond and Bhumia are the main settlers was up to a short time ago administered by three agencies: by the landlord, by the Revenue Department, or by the Forest Department of the State.

The area in possession of a landlord was called *malguzari*. In his area the landlord was the owner of the land which he rented out to tenants for cultivation. These tenants had certain occupancy rights in their holdings; they could not be ejected by the landlords as long as they paid their rent. However, in a sale the landlord had the right of first option. In every sale the landlord was entitled to a money consideration for giving his consent; it amounted to either three or five per cent of the price paid or one and a half times the annual rent.

The annual rent which the tenant had to pay was collected by the village headman (*mukaddam*) who was really the agent of the landlord. The land-tax to the Government had to be paid by the landlord.

In addition to the annual rent which was paid in cash, the landlord was entitled to free labour and certain other dues. The terms of free labour (*begar*) were the following: Every year each tenant had to fell one or two trees for the landlord, cut them into beams of proper size and haul them to the landlord's house. Every year at the time fixed by the landlord his tenants had to appear for work in his fields for two or three days. If they were kept any longer, the landlord had to pro-

vide for their food, but for the first few days the tenants had to bring their own food. When the work was done, the men of each village got a few rupees from the landlord for a drink on the last evening. While the work was not too exacting, it was often demanded at a time when the tenants had urgent work in their own fields.

The landlord (*malguzar*) also collected annually from every tenant a *kuru* (five litres) of maize (*bhyrta*), a *kuru* of rice, and from the owner of a buffalo a pound of clarified butter (*ghee*).

This system of *malguzari* has now been abolished; the tenants are now owners of the land.<sup>1</sup>

Another large area of eastern Mandla District came immediately under the administration of the Revenue Department; it was called *ryotwari* (*ryot*, subject). According to this system, the real owner of the land was the State. The occupancy right of free plots was usually auctioned. The cultivator who acquired a plot kept it for life, and after his death it was transferred to his heirs. But the occupancy right could not be sold or mortgaged. Nor could it be sub-leased without the permission of the Revenue Department, at least not for longer than one year. If the land-tax, which was collected by the village headman (*patel*), was not paid for three consecutive years, or if it was not cultivated, the field could be reclaimed by the Revenue Department and reauctioned.<sup>2</sup>

Again another system was employed in the forest tracts of eastern Mandla. It is still in force. The Forest Department, in charge of these tracts, allows a limited number of cultivators to settle in this area for the sole purpose of thus getting a permanent supply of labourers in the forest. The cultivators in the forest have certain privileges, such as tax-free land for cultivation or at a very low rent, free grazing of cattle, free supply of wood, grass and other jungle produce for their own requirements, not however for sale. But for these privileges

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Madhya Pradesh Abolition of Proprietary Rights Act, 1950.

<sup>2</sup> The *Ryotwari* administration has been abolished and the tenants have been made owners by the Madhya Pradesh Abolition of Proprietary Rights Act, 1950. Cf. Government of India, Ministry of Labour (1952): pp. 94 and 106.



they must supply labour for the Forest Department on a stipulated number of days. The work must be done where and when it is required. This is called *begar*. Naturally it often happens that the cultivators of forest plots are called away from their fields when they are busy sowing, weeding or harvesting their crops. If the forest officers are inconsiderate, the damage to the fields may be considerable. If such cases are repeated, the settlers usually abandon their fields and move to *malguzari* or *ryotwari* villages.

## 2. FARMING THE MAIN OCCUPATION OF THE GOND AND BHUMIA

According to the Census of India 1931<sup>3</sup> the Gond as well as the Baiga-Bhumia are mainly agriculturists. The number per 1,000 earners engaged on each occupation is as follows:

	BAIGA <sup>4</sup>	GOND
Agriculturists	421	511
Agents and managers of landed estates, forest officers and their clerks, rent- collectors etc.	10	..
Raisers of livestock, milkmen and herdsmen	8	25
Field labourers, woodcutters, etc.	464	400
Artisans and other workmen	25	9
Trade	42	10
Labourers, unspecified	14	15
Boatmen, carters, paliki-bearers, etc.	..	10
Domestic service	5	8
Other occupations	11	12

This Table shows that of 1,000 working Baiga, 885 are connected with the cultivation of the soil, either as independent farmers or as farm-servants. For the Gond, the number of independent farmers is higher—511—that of farm-servants correspondingly lower—400—but on the whole the percentage

<sup>3</sup> Vol. XII, Part I, pp. 265 and 267.

<sup>4</sup> As no separate figures were available for the Bhumia, I give those of the Baiga.

is as high or even higher than that of the Baiga. In comparison with the Gond, who proudly call themselves *kisans*, i.e. farmers, the Bhumia-Baiga are not very accomplished and prosperous farmers. Statistics only support this statement. If there is a chance of getting their food-supply in any other way, they leave their work on the field even in the most critical time of the season. Of course, there are exceptions and in almost every village some Bhumia can be found who by sheer hard work and thrift have reached a certain degree of wealth.

Generally speaking, the Bhumia cannot compete with the Gond, and certainly not with the agricultural non-tribal castes. But even of the Gond it must be said that their methods of cultivation are rather primitive. They, too, are keen on finding an excuse for absenting themselves from their fields for a good part of the year: in the hot season they like to visit their friends and relatives. Only now and then do they put in a full day's work in the fields to cut shrubs and trees growing there or to remove the roots of *khas* grass (*Saccharum spontaneum*) by hoe and digging stick, since their plough is not strong enough to root out stubborn weeds. In the winter season only such fields are cultivated which allow the raising of a crop without irrigation. Most of the farmers sit idle or work as occasional labourers in field and forest.

A few weeks before the monsoon rains start, Bhumia and Gond farmers get ready for ploughing. It is then only that most of them realize that they need bullocks. They try to borrow a pair and when they have at last succeeded in getting them, it is more often than not too late for ploughing. When the time comes for sowing, they have to borrow the seed grain. Borrowed seed is often of poor quality, and so, consequently, is the crop.

Meanwhile, the women have been busy cleaning the fields and removing weeds and the stubble of the past crops. But once the monsoon has set in and the field is at last prepared and sown, Gond and Bhumia farmers work really hard and interrupt work only if the downpour is too heavy or there is a chance of a rich catch of fish.



## 3. BEWAR CULTIVATION

The traditional method of cultivation of the Gond and Bhumia was in former times by the axe; they called it *bewar* or *bimra*. This method of cultivation not only corresponded to their general material culture, but was also ideologically consolidated in their ancient beliefs and surrounded with venerable and impressive religious and social ceremonies. Plough cultivation, on the other hand, was introduced by the Government, and they are still by tradition and inclination averse to it. But *bewar* cultivation has been practically abolished and plough cultivation is now the rule, though many Gond and even more, the Bhumia, still remember with strong nostalgia the time when they were living by means of this particular method of cultivation.

Cultivation by the axe was done in the following manner: A Gond or Bhumia first tried to get a plot of land in the virgin jungle. Whenever possible, several families together decided to settle at a new site, clearing the forest for fields and thus starting a new settlement. In former times this was easy, but nowadays, with the ever-increasing pressure of non-tribal settlers, and the strict control by the Revenue and Forest Departments, it is almost impossible to secure a jungle plot for *bewar* cultivation.

Once such a plot was secured, large enough for several families, they moved to the new site at the beginning of the hot season. First they cut down all the trees. They left them where they fell. They chopped off the branches which they spread all over the clearing. After a month or two, when the timber had dried, it was fired. The whole jungle burned for days. It was usually in the month of *Jeth* (May to June) that the jungle was fired.

After the first showers of the approaching monsoon had doused the fire and somewhat cooled the burning soil, the sowing started. But even if the monsoon was delayed and no rain fell, the new settlers soon began to sow their seeds into the hot ashes. Without any previous cleaning of the field or ploughing of the ground, the seed was spread by hand. The first seed sown was always *baurha kutki* (white

*kutki*). Then they sowed a kind of cucumber (*khira*) and a melon of small size which they called *pithi*, further a kind of beans which they called *rauas* (the Hindi word for it is *barbati*). After that came another kind of beans, *jhinjru*, a few grains of millet (*juar*) and *katki*, a grain even smaller than *kutki*. Then followed one more kind of beans (*salhar*). Both *katki* and *salhar* are no longer sown in our days. All these seeds were mixed with *kutki* grains and spread by hand. In former times *khira*, *pithi*, *rauas* and *juar* were always sown in small holes made with the digging stick (*phar*). This method is rarely used at present.

The new shoots soon appeared after the first heavy showers of the monsoon between the logs and thick trunks which had not been consumed by the fire. New shoots grew up from the fallen trees; green shrubs and bushes made their appearance everywhere. Weeding had, therefore, to start at once, or the tender seedlings would soon suffocate in the lush undergrowth. The shrubs and bushes were cut down by the men, while women and children weeded the grass. Wherever possible, the men also removed the big logs and thick branches lying in the field and piled them up in a corner of the clearing to be burned after the harvest or to be cut up for fuel.

As soon as one part of the field had been cleared of shrubs and grass, work had to be started at the other end. Fresh shoots were for ever growing in the fertile soil. The men were continuously kept busy cutting shrubs and bushes, the women and children weeding the grass. It was a back-breaking job from morning till night to wrest the field from the prolific jungle. The forest does not yield easily to the intrusion of the cultivator and ever again almost succeeds in suffocating the new crop in the fast-growing underwood. While all this work had to be done, the field had to be guarded day and night against the animals of the forest coming to feast stealthily on the green crops.

With a few months of hard work, the crops ripened and the harvest could begin. Men, women and children took part in it. They tied a cloth like an apron around the waist and gathered in it the ears which they cut from the stalks with a primitive sickle. The stalks of the grain were not cut, since



the *bewar* cultivators did not need any fodder; they had no cattle. The stalks were left to dry on the field and were burned when the field was made ready for the second sowing. The beans, pumpkins and melons were collected as soon as they got ripe or were required for the cooking pot.

After the harvest, the field was allowed to grow wild. The trees cut down in the previous hot season and left lying in the field or piled up in a corner were now cut up. Meanwhile, shrubs and bushes were again growing up in the harvested field. They too had to be cut or dug out. This second clearing, however, was considerably easier than the first. All the wood was spread over the field. When it was sufficiently dry, it was fired. The soil fertilized by the ashes was once more ready to receive the seed without any previous ploughing.

If, however, the first clearing had been done so thoroughly that the field remained almost free of shrubs and bushes, it was left fallow and allowed to grow wild during the whole following monsoon. Another plot of virgin forest was cleared and sown as previously described. Usually, however, a jungle plot could be cultivated for two or three consecutive years because the trees and bushes burned to ashes provided sufficient fertile soil for another crop.

It is obvious that for this particular form of cultivation there was no need for ploughing. No bullocks were required. All the work of clearing a jungle could be done by human labour. The use of a plough was in fact impossible in an area recently cleared and still covered with logs and grown with shrubs and bushes. Bullocks would have been unable to drag the plough through such a field. These fields were, moreover, often so steep that the use of the plough would have been harmful: it would have loosened the thin layer of soil and the next fierce rains might have swept it off.

It is commonly believed that Gond and Bhumia were very fond of shifting cultivation because it required less effort than plough cultivation. My informants maintained that this assumption is erroneous. If anything, *bewar* cultivation was more laborious than plough cultivation. But it was at the same time more exciting and less monotonous. It allowed also, at times, leisure for a hunting or fishing expedition or

for the collection of jungle produce, of roots and fruits, which again made for greater variety of diet. All round, it allowed a freer exercise of all human faculties, while the life of a plough cultivator is rather dull and monotonous.

But considered from another angle, *bewar* cultivation is wasteful and dangerous for the forest if practised on a large scale. As long as wide jungle tracts were available for a comparatively small population of shifting cultivators, the cutting of trees and burning of the bush created no problem. But now the population has much increased and large parts of the jungle have been cleared for plough cultivation. The wasteful destruction of trees and woods in *bewar* cultivation would now soon lead to a catastrophic depletion of the forest, to erosion of the soil and a laying waste of whole tracts. It is for this reason that *bewar* cultivation was disallowed by the Forest Department. It is true that this injunction of the Government seriously disturbed the economic and cultural equilibrium of the jungle tribes practising shifting cultivation, but it could not be helped. Today, the great majority of the Gond and Bhumia have resigned themselves to the inevitable, though their new form of cultivation is of the poorest.

#### 4. THE GARDEN

There is a garden (*bari*) attached to every Gond or Bhumia house. A plot of land is fenced in and ploughed up, after being cleaned of shrubs and trees. Then all the manure of the cattle-shed and the rubbish of the house is daily dumped in the garden. The refuse or dung is at once spread over a small part of it, so that in the course of time the whole area is well covered with it. Often the manure is first burned and then the ashes are spread over and ploughed under before the rains start.

After the first rain showers, maize (*bhurta*) is sown by hand. When the heads have formed, some may be broken off and roasted while still soft. But this is done only when there is no other grain in the house. Generally, all corn is allowed to ripen on the stalks. When the maize is ripe, the heads are cut off and hung under the roof in rows. As maize gruel is



much liked by the aboriginals of eastern Mandla, the heads soon disappear. Especially in the later part of the monsoon when the grain bins are empty, the heads of maize are taken down one by one from the rafters, the grains removed, ground and cooked to a broth (*pej*).

Only after the maize has been harvested, are the stalks cut and stored for cattle fodder. Then the garden is again ploughed or at least harrowed with the paring harrow (*bakhar*). After the monsoon, mustard (*rai*) is sown. In the month of *Bhado* (August), tobacco is planted in a corner of the garden. The seedlings are from stray seeds which grow as weeds all over the garden, or are supplied by a kind neighbour.

In other parts of the garden, diverse vegetables are sown, such as *bhaji*, *chorwari*, *kotna* (spinach), *lal bhaji*, etc. These vegetables are planted quite frequently right at the beginning of the monsoon at the same time as the maize.

Some people also have a few banana plants in their garden, or papaya trees, but rarely a guava or mango tree. In former times people did not stay long enough at one place to find it worth their while to grow fruit trees. Though now both Gond and Bhumia have become more sedentary, they still have not formed the habit of growing fruit trees in their gardens.

## 5. PLOUGH CULTIVATION

The aboriginal farmers of eastern Mandla need no professional carpenters to make their ploughs (*nangar*). Almost every man is sufficiently skilled to make or repair his plough. Only the ploughshare (*kassia* or *phar*) is supplied by the local smith (*Agaria*) or bought in the market.

The Gond and Bhumia use the same type of plough as the non-tribal agricultural castes of the district; it is lighter and perhaps less skilfully made. For the body of the plough, the maker selects a sufficiently heavy log of the *Tinsa* (*Ougenia dalbergoides*), *Tendu* (*Diospyros montana*) or *Dhaura* tree (*Anogeissus latifolia*). He just cuts off a branch of the tree, sufficiently thick and slightly curved. The whole body of the plough is about four feet high; through a bend in the middle

it is divided into two equal parts. The lower part is wedge-shaped and fitted with an iron share held fast by an iron ring. The ploughshare is simply an iron bar, about a foot long or slightly longer, pointed at the lower end. It much resembles a spearhead (*phar*) from which it in fact derives its name. The ploughshare is affixed to the inner side of the lower part of the body so that it slightly overlaps the tapering end of the plough's body. When the plough is moved forward, the share is tightly pressed against the wooden body. The upper portion of the plough's body is square-shaped and holds a short stilt which serves as a guiding handle. The draught-pole, about nine feet long, is stuck into the plough's body at the point where the upper and the lower portions of the body meet at an angle.

For the sowing of the winter crop, the plough is turned into a drill-plough by attaching to it a bamboo tube in such a manner that the lower end of the tube is just a few inches behind the ploughshare. The seeds fall through the tube into the furrow and are covered with soil when the next furrow is drawn. The Gond and Bhumia never plough in straight furrows; the rows are always slightly curved, but parallel and only a hand's breadth apart.

It is obvious that the primitive type of plough used by the Gond and Bhumia only scratches the surface of the soil and is ineffective in uprooting shrubs and strong roots. The plough cuts only four or five inches into the ground, and does not turn the soil. Since bigger shrubs and the tough roots of the *kans* grass (*Sachharum spontaneum*) cannot be uprooted with this light and primitive plough, the ploughman either lifts the plough over such obstructive spots or ploughs around them. Such shrubs or roots must be removed by hoe or spud, a work which is often done in the hot season, if at all.

The fields are ploughed before and at the beginning of the monsoon. Fields lying fallow for the sowing of the winter crop are also ploughed during the monsoon when there is a break in the rains and no other work is more pressing. Such fields must be ploughed several times, or they overgrow with weeds to such an extent that they cannot be cleaned when it is time for sowing.



Fields on a slope are ploughed horizontally to prevent soil erosion.

Ploughing, as well as harrowing, is always done by men. Among the non-tribals, all farm work which implies the handling of bullocks is reserved for men. The aboriginal farmers observe the same custom.

After a field has been ploughed, it is harrowed with the paring harrow (*bakhar*) for the purpose of loosening the soil, breaking the clods dug up by the plough and of rooting out the stubble of last year's crop or the grass. The paring harrow consists of a heavy block of timber, four or five feet long. At the bottom are inserted two prongs which hold a broad iron blade. This blade is supplied by the local blacksmith, the *Agaria*. The harrow is drawn over the field by means of two draught-poles which are joined at the top-ends where the yoke is affixed. It is directed by a driving stilt or handle.

A field, after it has been ploughed, is harrowed twice cross-wise. Then, when the rains start, the field is harrowed again, either once or often twice. Then only is the field ready for sowing. After the sowing, the harrow is no longer required and is brought back home or carried to a field which is left lying fallow for the winter crop. Such a field is harrowed several times in the monsoon and again in winter after ploughing.

At the time of harrowing, shrubs and bushes which have grown up in the field and could not be uprooted by the plough are cut with the square-headed axe or dug out with pickaxe and hoe.

### *Irrigation*

Irrigation is almost unknown among the *Bhumia* and *Gond* of eastern *Mandla*. Their winter crops do not require irrigation; they do not grow sugar cane, water-wheat or other irrigation crops. There are no orchards. The number of wells in aboriginal villages is small. The villagers fetch their water usually from one of the many rivulets and ponds. Wells in the fields are still rarer.

The aboriginal farmers of eastern *Mandla* do little to improve the yield of their fields. They rarely ever build embank-

ments (*bandhan*) for water-rice cultivation or for the prevention of soil erosion. Sometimes a farmer builds a weir of stone across a stream (*nala*) which, while allowing the water to pass, checks to some extent the erosion of the fertile soil. After the first stormy showers of the monsoon, the stream quickly fills up its bed with fertile soil. On such patches, paddy or wheat may be sown. But more often it happens that the water finds another outlet and carries off much good soil from other parts of the field.

The great indifference of not only the Bhumia but also the Gond of eastern Mandla in regard to irrigation and building of embankments is not in accordance with the tradition of the Gond. In the annals of the Gond Kings, the digging of tanks for cultivation is often mentioned. Sangram Shah, the Gond King of Garha, was responsible for the digging of a lake at Garha. There was a magnificent tank on the summit of Chauragarh, a fort built by the same King. Hirde Shah, a little later, is said to have planted 100,000 mango trees and to have constructed another reservoir, the Ganga Sagar, near Garha.<sup>5</sup> In Chanda District, south of Mandla, the Gond King, Hir Shah, gave special rewards to those 'who had constructed tanks on their property, and those who had made irrigation channels or canals were often given all the land which their waters reached.'<sup>6</sup> Such grants were known as *tukm*. The best tank builders were of the caste of the Kohli and of the Panwar whom the Gond Kings most probably imported from the south.<sup>7</sup>

The quality of the fields could be much improved by irrigation, the more so as eastern Mandla is a hilly country with plenty of water so that irrigation dams would do much good. They could be built at relatively small cost. But such irrigation schemes surpass by far the financial resources of the farmers; such schemes would have to be planned and executed by the State or Central Government.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Chatterton, (1916): pp. 18, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Chatterton, (1916): p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> Russell and Hiralal, (1916): Vol. 3, p. 493.



### Sowing

The seeds of the monsoon crops are spread broadcast. Hand-sowing is a man's job. Usually the owner of a field himself does the sowing. Young men are rarely allowed to sow. But the winter crops, which are sown with the drill-plough (*nari*), may be sown by women.

Broadcast sowing can be done also during a light drizzle, though it is stopped in a heavy downpour for fear that the water might wash the seed off the field.

The sower keeps the seed grain in a small bamboo basket which he holds in his left hand. With the right hand he takes a handful of seed and spreads it, walking up and down in the field. In this manner about ten litres of grain (two *kuru*) can be sown in a day.

When the sowing is done by means of the seed-drill, up to fifty litres (ten *kuru*) of grain are sown in a day. The seed-drill is a bamboo tube fitted into a wooden bowl attached to the plough. The seed is fed by hand into the bowl, and drops through the tube into the furrow just behind the ploughshare, being covered with soil moved when the next furrow is drawn. No harrowing is necessary after sowing.

The farmers welcome a few heavy showers after their sowing. If the rains fail to come, the tender shoots springing up after a few days begin to wither and die. This is the reason why the crops so often fail in spite of a plentiful monsoon.

### Weeding

Weeding starts soon after sowing. Since the monsoon crops are sown broadcast and not in rows, the weeding plough (*kolpa*) of the non-tribal farmers is of no use. All the weeding must be done by hand. This is the task of women and children for the greater part of the monsoon season.

Weeding starts first in the garden; then follows the weeding of the *kodo* in the fields. Maize (grown in the garden) requires only one weeding, while *kodo* must be weeded several times. Also the other crops must be weeded repeatedly, especially paddy, linseed and sesame.

In the months of *Srawan* and *Bhado* (July and August) all the women and girls are busy the whole day. They scarcely

find time to go home and cook. At such times when no other urgent work is at hand men may also help.

Weeding begins when the shoots are half a foot high. It should not begin earlier lest the tender seedlings suffer by being stepped on or otherwise damaged by the weeders. A slight rain does not prevent the weeders from carrying on their work. They use the rain hood (*khumri*) as a protection against the rain.

When a field urgently requires weeding and time presses, hired labourers must be employed. But few farmers can afford to hire more than four or five women. The daily wages of such temporary helpers consist of one *kureya* (2½ litres) of grain and a meal at noon.

### *Guarding the Fields*

When the new crop is growing up, the field must be watched day and night against wild animals which visit the fields to browse on the tender shoots. Much damage is done by deer, wild pigs and especially by birds in the harvest season. The farmers of eastern Mandla complain that they are not allowed to use effective weapons to save their crops from these pests.

There is less fear of thieves. Thefts are committed when the grain has been harvested, but rarely when it is still on the field. After the harvest, however, while the grain is being threshed and winnowed, it must be guarded against thieves.

The field watchman sits on a high platform erected on four poles. As a protection against the rain and the cool night air, the platform is roofed with grass and at least on two sides it is also covered with walls of leaves and branches. Sometimes only a small hole is left open to allow a look-out, for the nights are cold and the chilly breeze cuts to the marrow.

Deer and birds are shied away by making as much noise as possible. A kerosene tin is hung near the watch-hut (*mandwa*) which is beaten when any animals approach the field. Fire-crackers are exploded at night to keep away the wild pigs.

Scarecrows are made and placed in the centre and at the corners of the fields; these consist of figures of men, dogs and other animals, often strikingly true to nature. The arms or



the head are made to swing in the breeze.

Field-watching is generally the job of elderly men and of children. They have to stay out on the field throughout the night and most of the day when the workers are absent. While able-bodied men and women do all the field-work, elderly or disabled persons make themselves useful by watching the crops at night.

The crops have to be guarded till the harvest is completed. When the bundles of the crops have been brought to the barn, the watch ceases, but is resumed after the threshing of the grain when thieves might carry off the grain.

### *The Harvest*

When the crops are ripe, they are cut with the sickle (*hassia*). Such a sickle is of iron with a steel edge and a wooden handle. It is supplied by the local smith (*Agaria*) or bought in the market. The sickle is used for weeding as well as for cutting the crops and grass.

When the crops are cut, they are at once tied into sheaves (*bhoja*), and stacked at certain intervals. Such a stack is called *karhi*. The stacks are left to dry on the field for eight or ten days.

At a convenient place, a plot is then cleared and levelled and covered with a layer of cattle manure. This place is called *kanihar*. When the dung-coating has dried, the sheaves are opened and spread over the whole place. Then a number of bullocks are tethered with a long rope (*galayan*) and driven around a wooden peg (*merhi*) in the centre of the *kanihar*. The grain is thus trodden out under the feet of the bullocks. If a farmer lacks the sufficient number of bullocks for threshing, he borrows some from his neighbours. This threshing is called *daye*.

After threshing, the straw is removed and heaped up in a corner. The grain is collected in another corner. Then the straw is again spread over the dung-coated area around the wooden pole and threshed once more.

A poor farmer sometimes threshes his grain by beating it with a wooden hand-fledgel. This method is also employed if the quantity of the harvested grain is small.

After all the grain has been threshed out, it is piled up in a heap and winnowed. Winnowing is done in the traditional manner by letting the wind play on the grain and chaff as it is dropped from a basket held aloft.

When the grain has been cleaned, it is filled into a gunny bag (*sutri*) and carried home on the back of a bullock. If a man has no bullocks he carries the grain on his own back. At home, the grain is filled into the mud-baked grain bins (*kothi*) of which every farmer has several in his house. Grain is sold to the dealers if there is any left, over and above the amount which the family requires for the year. At harvest time, the moneylenders come and demand repayment of their loans. They have first to be satisfied. Small quantities of grain are taken along to the weekly market and bartered for salt, butter, oil, liquor, spices, earthen pots and other household requirements. The itinerant traders all accept grain instead of money.

## 6. A FARMER'S WORKING DAY

The working day of a Bhumia or Gond farmer begins early in the morning when the cock crows or the sun rises. The women are generally the first to get up in order to grind the flour required for the day. This business of grinding the flour for the day takes perhaps two or three hours. Most women have to rise before daybreak to complete grinding a day's provision before the others get up. This tedious work is often enlivened by singing. The men rise somewhat later and take the plough-bullocks out for grazing. After about an hour's grazing they return, yoke the bullocks and get their implements ready for the work in the fields. Meanwhile the Ahir arrives, milks the cows and buffaloes and takes all the animals not required for field-work out to the grazing ground. Then the farmers proceed at a leisurely pace to their fields and begin to plough or to harrow, while at home, the women clean the cattle-shed, carry the manure (*khat*) into the garden, sweep the house and the courtyard. Then they go to the water-place of the village, a pond (*nala*) or a well, wash their hands and feet, fill their earthen pitchers to the accompaniment of



much gossip and carry them, walking in single file on well-worn paths, back home to the village. At home they soon begin to prepare the morning meal which usually consists of *kodai* gruel (*pej*) with a dish of vegetables (*bhajri*). After the children have been fed, the women put the food for their men in a basket, fill a pot with water and carry it all to the fields. If there is an old man or woman in the house able to look after the children, they are left at home; otherwise the women wrap their babies into a sheet which they sling over their back, and call the bigger children to accompany them to the field.

When the women arrive, the men stop working, rinse their mouths and wash their hands at a nearby stream and then take their meal. The women pour gruel on a leaf plate and serve it with vegetables. When the men have had their fill, the women sit down and have their meal, while the men rest and smoke a pipe. This meal is called *murgal*. After the meal, men and women work on the field, the men continue to plough or harrow, the women weed or do other work as the season demands. At noon all take a short rest and then work together till about 4 p.m. Then they eat the rest of the morning's meal. This meal is called *marria*. Afterwards, the men continue their work till sunset, when a man or boy takes the working cattle out for grazing while the others return home. The women return after the *marria* to the village, fetch water and prepare the evening meal (*byari*). When the men arrive at home they wash face and hands or even take a full bath. Then they sit down, smoke their pipes and chat. It is about 9 p.m. when the evening meal is ready. It consists usually of a stiff *kodai* porridge (*bhat*) with lentils (*dar*) or other vegetables. Again the men eat first, the women after them. The children may eat with the men or with the women. It is considered bad manners to disturb a person while he takes his meals.

After dinner, the men and bigger boys again return to the fields and often spend the night watching the crops on a platform erected on posts. If there is an old man or cripple unfit for heavy work in the family he is usually employed as a day and night watchman, so that the men and women who work

in the field during the day may sleep undisturbed at night. After a day's hard work in the field the men find it hard to keep awake during the night. But when the hardest work is over, men and boys like to stay out in the fields where they chat, smoke and drink, and tell stories till late at night. Women generally do not stay out with the men, except perhaps young women who accompany their husbands to a lonely watch. Babies may not be taken out for the night; therefore, women with small children must stay at home. At dawn, the field-watchers climb from their stilted huts (*mandwa*) and return home, leaving a boy or man to continue the watch.

Though the men's work may be heavier, the women's chores are generally more varied and take longer. Many a time men sit around the fire and smoke while the women clean the stable and cook. They have to get up long before the men to grind the flour for the morning's meal, and in the evening after they have returned from the field they have to prepare the meal and do all the house work while the men rest.

## 7. FARM SERVICE

The Bhumia and the Gond may work as farm-servants for any employers, Hindus or Muslims, though generally they prefer to serve farmers of their own caste. The Gond in rare cases take employment for other work too, the Bhumia never. Not only domestic service, such as cooking and hauling water, but also work in factories, or as artisans, is barred to them by tradition and ancient convention.

Steady jobs are not to their liking. The Gond, and still more so the Bhumia, dislike to be ordered about, to be told what to do and when to do it, or to appear regularly and punctually at work at another man's bidding. They would rather dig for roots in the jungle than put in a day of field service.

At the time of my inquiries at Duhanja, there was only one Bhumia in that village who could be called a good field servant, and the only reason why he worked well was that he had six small children who would have starved had he not worked. The other Bhumia of the village refused to work as field



servants and even as occasional labourers, and if they accepted a job they came late and worked badly. Though the *kodo* crop had failed that year and many were starving, they were still reluctant to seek employment as labourers.

In Mandla District, three forms of employment are in vogue: employment as permanent field servant (*barsi* or *barkhi*), as ploughman (*harwaha*), or as occasional labourer (*bani*). Though the system of engaging field labour is the same all over the district, the prevalence of the various systems is different in the diverse *tahsils*.

#### (a) *The Permanent Field Servant*

Bhumia and Gond take permanent employment as field servants only when they are in need of a considerable sum of money which they cannot borrow or secure in any other way. The wages for a year's service were before the last war Rs. 35 to Rs. 40 a year; so much being paid in advance at the beginning of the service. A man who urgently required about that amount of money for a wedding, a funeral or caste dinner, had no other choice but to hire himself or his son out as a field servant. For the advance he took he had of course to pay interest of half an anna per rupee per month. This interest could be worked off at the end of the year. But if the servant took only half his wages in advance, he was not charged any interest. If he took his meals at the house of his employer, he received only half his wages in cash. But in addition to his wages he could expect a pair of shoes and a loincloth from his employer, though, strictly speaking, he had no right to demand these things. In fact, non-tribal employers frequently refuse to give them. It is also for this reason that Gond and Bhumia prefer to serve for men of their own caste, because they say that caste fellows are more considerate in their treatment of field servants.

A few examples will show how this employment system works: At Mohgaon in Mandla District a Gond borrowed two *khandi* of *kodo* at the price of three to four rupees per *khandi* from a merchant (Bania) of Mandla. As he failed to pay the interest, his debt had increased to three *khandi*, after another year to four *khandi* or Rs. 13-8. The Gond also took some

money from the merchant, but forgot how much it was. In order to repay his debt, the Gond took service with the merchant at a wage of four rupees per month. After five months' work, the merchant informed him that his debt had been worked off.

At Kui, a Bhumia took Rs. 12 from an Ahir. First the Bhumia tried to repay his debt by serving the Ahir as his ploughman. After he had served three years, he became the Ahir's permanent field servant. When he had served another three years, he wanted to leave the Ahir's service, but the latter told him that he still owed him Rs. 16. The Bhumia maintained that he never took another loan or left the Ahir's service. His wife supports the family by daily labour or by collecting jungle produce.

Another Bhumia took Rs. 20 from the same Ahir. He worked seven years for the Ahir, and still his debt was not annulled. The Bhumia took no other loans during the time of his service.

#### (b) *The Ploughman*

A ploughman (*harwaha*) is only employed for five or six months in the monsoon and three months in the winter season. If employed for the monsoon his service begins after Holi (in March) and ends in *Bhado* (August). If employed for the winter season, he starts work in September and works till December (from *Bhado* till *Pus* or *Kartik*).

Many ploughmen get employment for one season only. For the rest of the year they live on the grain which they have earned as ploughmen, on roots and forest produce collected in the jungle, or on occasional labour. Often they are forced to take a loan of grain (*barhi*) for which they are charged 50 per cent interest.

The ploughman is paid in kind. He gets his food twice a day, in the afternoon at about 4 p.m. (*marriajun*, when they drink their *kodai* gruel), and late in the evening (at *biyarjun*, when they get a more substantial dinner). The ploughman usually eats at the house of his employer. But if his caste does not allow him to do so, he receives as his daily ration one *kureya* (2½ seer or litres) of unhusked *kodo*. Husking



reduces this quantity by half. But it is sufficient for a day's food for one man; its cost was one anna before the last war. A ploughman's wife and children must work elsewhere, or they have nothing to eat, for the head of the family does not earn enough to provide for them too.

But in addition to his daily food the ploughman gets five *kureya* (12½ seers) of seed grain (*kodo*, *kutki*, paddy, flax, etc. for the monsoon crop; wheat, gram and pulses for the winter crop). His employer points out a patch of his field to the ploughman which the latter may cultivate and sow along with the field of his employer for his own benefit. Naturally, this plot of land is not exactly his employer's best, nor is the ploughman allowed to employ much time in its cultivation.<sup>8</sup> This accounts for the fact that the ploughman, though he should expect about 100 *kureya* of grain from the plot, generally gets much less. This seed grain which a ploughman gets is called *bowara*. Some employers give their ploughmen a blanket or loincloth, a pair of shoes or at least a rain hood, especially if they have been working with them for several years in succession.

Employers may lend their ploughmen's service to other farmers. The wages they earn are paid to the employers.

While a permanent field servant has greater security as he is employed for the whole year, a ploughman has more independence. But he may starve in the off-season, as his term of service is much shorter. Moreover, he may pretend that he does not work as a servant, but just for his daily meals and for the lease of a small plot of land and the use of two bullocks. The blanket and the shoes which are given to him by his employer he accepts as a present. Anyway, they are not presented to him early in his service, but at a later date, when he has shown himself a reliable worker.

The following survey carried out in 19 villages of Shahpur Circle in Dindori *tahsil* by Rev. J. van Heertum shows clearly that at least in this area employment as ploughmen surpasses by far that of farm-servants:

<sup>8</sup> If the ploughman leaves his service before the completion of his contract, the yield on this plot goes to the owner of the field.

VILLAGE	EMPLOYED AS PLOUGHMEN	AS PERMANENT FIELD SERVANTS
Hanota	15	..
Palaria	12	2
Gopalpur	6	..
Ramgura	3	2
Goira	4	..
Nayagoan	1	1
Pondi (Neosa)	4	15
Sarastal	3	1
Deori	5	1
Bidepur	3	1
Bicharpur	10	3
Bharwai	6	4
Deokara	..	..
Parasi	11	..
Bargoan	2	..
Neosa	1	..
Kui	8	2
Murki	13	8
Mineri	9	2
	<hr/>	<hr/>
TOTAL	126	42
	<hr/>	<hr/>

At Duhania and other places it was said that permanent field servants, provided they get their wages, are often better off than ploughmen whose pay depends on the season. Permanent field servants, however, are heard to say that ploughmen are at an advantage, but this is true in a favourable year only. The ploughman is considered to be in a better position also because he has at least some time in the year which he can call his own.

### (c) Occasional Employment

Employment for occasional daily labour is called *bani*. Occasional labourers go by the name of *banihar*, *thalwa*, or *rajjhar*.<sup>9</sup> Usually they are paid in kind: they receive for a

<sup>9</sup> *Rajjhar* is the name of a caste of farm-servants.



day's work two to three seers of unhusked grain, either *kodo* or rice, or half as much of wheat, gram or *masur* (a pulse). Occasional labour is required for weeding, harvesting, grass-cutting, for building or thatching a house, or for the erection of dykes in paddy fields. At times when continuous rain does not give much time for weeding, many additional hands must be employed; consequently their wages rise steeply. But ordinarily there is not much demand for daily labourers. The farmers try to get along without them if possible. A daily labourer therefore counts himself lucky if he is engaged for 60 days in a year. During the time of unemployment he digs for roots or collects jungle produce.

Taking the Shahpura Circle north of the Narbada as a sample, we may safely say that in Dindori *tahsil* at least 25 per cent of the population in a village, that is from 15 to 25 families, (in bigger villages up to 30 and 40 families), live on occasional labour, apart from the women and children of ploughmen and permanent field servants.

People who, for some reason, have lost their fields or bullocks, are forced to take to occasional labour. Yearly epidemics among cattle reduce many to this state of *banihar*. Once a man is reduced to this status, he finds it extremely difficult to regain the status of a tenant or landowner. It is not that no land is available for cultivation, but in order to get a good field the village headman, the land surveyor and several other persons must be bribed. In other fields, the soil is so exhausted or they are so infested with weeds, like *kans* (*Saccharum spontaneum*) or *moa*, that hardly anything will grow on them. A man who has lost his bullocks may be able to hire others, but the rate of rent is high: three *khandi* of *kodo* or one *khandi* of wheat per bullock. If his field is not very good, he is not able to pay the rent and at the same time to support himself and his family.

#### 8. GOND AND BHUMIA AS CULTIVATORS

The Gond and Bhumia are as a whole rather indifferent farmers. They prefer to sow light crops in light soils. Light crops grow well in hilly tracts and do not require intensive

preparation of the field. Generally our aboriginals just barely harrow a field; they dispense with ploughing whenever possible. Ploughing is indeed rather difficult on the steep slopes of the hills and in the rocky soil of the tracts in eastern Mandla. Another reason why they are averse to frequent ploughing is that on the hilly tracts the soil is not deep enough to allow deep ploughing. Moreover, deep and frequent ploughing would loosen the soil to such an extent, that the heavy rains at the beginning of the monsoon might wash it away.

It goes without saying that the poor soil of the hilly tracts is soon exhausted. But few aboriginal farmers ever think of manuring their fields; all the dung of the cattle and the rubbish of the house is daily carried into the garden (*bari*), and nothing is left for the fields. Since they own a few heads of cattle only, which moreover are out almost the whole day in the jungle for grazing, they have not sufficient manure for the garden, let alone for the fields. The garden requires good manuring to yield a crop year after year. Besides, in the opinion of the farmers of eastern Mandla, there is not much sense in manuring a field on the slope of a hill—and most of their fields are on steep hills—as the first heavy rains would wash the manure away into the river.

The aboriginal farmers of eastern Mandla have no definite ideas about rotation of crops. They sow their seeds year after year just as they please. When a field does not yield as much as they might reasonably expect, they do not think of changing the crop, but let the field lie fallow for a year.



## CHAPTER VI

### CROPS

#### *Maize*

MAIZE (*bhurta*) is an important garden crop and is sown right at the beginning of the monsoon. A well-manured garden produces an abundant crop, the stalks being six to eight feet high, with several cobs close to the stem.

In every maize field there is a watch-hut (*mandwa*), a platform made of saplings about ten feet above the ground. Old men and children guard the crop. By day parrots, crows and other birds come in swarms to feast on the milky and sweet young cobs. The watchmen chase them away incessantly, and one can hear them yelling in every garden, or beating on kerosene tins, upturned buckets and pots. They also throw stones at the birds or shoot them with catapults and slings. At night, maize fields are often visited by wild pigs and jackals, more rarely by deer. Jackals seem to have a great liking for the sweet cobs and can hardly be kept off. They do great damage because they are cunning and always succeed in slipping through the densest hedge. They hide in the garden and are not easily frightened by mere noise. Wild pigs do even greater damage; they break through the hedges and trample many stalks to the ground. They devour the cobs, but destroy much more than they eat. It is difficult and even dangerous to chase them away. The only effective weapon against wild pigs would be a gun or rifle; but Government officials are reluctant to issue licences as these weapons would almost surely be used for poaching in the forest.

As the supply of grain at the end of the monsoon is usually running out, the maize comes very handy. The cobs, when still green, are broken off and roasted over a fire. But this is done only when there is serious scarcity of food. Otherwise, the cobs are allowed to ripen on the stalk. This happens in October. At harvest, the cobs are first cut off and hung by

their leaves on bamboo poles under the roof or stored in earthen pots. Sometimes they are hung up in the open on a long pole and covered with a rain hood to keep off the birds. The cobs hanging on poles under the roof are also covered with a rain hood, to prevent rats from getting at them.

When the new maize is harvested, relatives and friends are invited to a maize-eating feast. Since maize ripens earlier in one village and later in another, there is much visiting and return-visiting at that time of the year.

### Kodo and Kutki

The main crops of the aboriginals in eastern Mandla are *kodo* (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*) and *kutki* (*Panicum mileaceum*). *Kodo* is a light millet, but *kutki* is still smaller in grain. Husked *kodo* is called *kodai*.

*Kodo* and *kutki* grow on all soils, but best on red soil (*barra*). However, the poor red soil is quickly exhausted by a *kodo* crop which is very productive. *Kodo* can be grown in the same field for two consecutive years; the third year the field must lie fallow. *Kutki* is not so productive as *kodo*, the same amount of seed giving only half the yield which *kodo* gives.

When a field is left lying fallow after two or three years of a *kodo* or *kutki* crop, a grain called *sikia* grows wild in such a field. This grain is very small, smaller even than *kutki*. Poor people gather it in abandoned fields, and prepare it like *kodo* or *kutki*.

### Black Gram

Another important crop is black gram (*urda*, *Phaseolus radiatus*) which is sown in the month of *Srawan* (July). It is a pulse which is very popular among the Gond and Bhumbia and eaten with bread. For a festive meal they prepare *urda* cakes baked in oil. They are called *barra*. While the non-tribal agriculturists sow this crop with other seeds which ripen later, the aboriginals of eastern Mandla sow it as a separate crop. It is sown broadcast. *Urda* ripens early after the monsoon.

Another pulse, but less frequently sown, is the so-called



pigeon pea (*tuar*, *Cajanus indicus*). It is said to grow best in red soil and is sown only in small quantities. The pigeon pea ripens late, in December or January. At the harvest the stalks are cut, dried and beaten against the ground till the seeds fall out. The stalks provide excellent material for baskets and brooms.

*Masur* (*Ervum lens*), a lentil, is sown after the monsoon as a winter crop. It is sown with the seed-drill like wheat or gram.

### *Paddy*

Paddy is grown only in low-lying and swampy fields. There are two varieties of paddy: one is sown soon after the first heavy showers of the monsoon in black soil. It must be weeded as often as *kodo*. Weeding is not easy when there has been a heavy rainfall and the paddy fields are flooded. This variety is harvested in October. The other variety, the so-called water-rice, must be transplanted from a field of seedlings into a field under water. For such fields, embankments are required. Some Gond have already started to build them, but the Bhumia are still reluctant to follow. They object to the high expenses and the heavy work which water-rice cultivation requires. The embankments (*bandhan*) have to be erected during the hot season and require many days of hard work just at a time when the Bhumia like to pay visits to their relatives and friends. Moreover, such work often requires the help of hired labour for which the Bhumia lack funds. Labourers must be paid in hard cash. Also, the transplanting of the shoots requires hired labour because many hands are needed to plant a field. The ploughing of a paddy field, flooded in the monsoon, requires a strong pair of bullocks, for the heavy and sticky soil in which paddy flourishes must be well ploughed. Such bullocks are usually beyond the financial possibilities of the Bhumia. The Gond, who are financially better situated and also more enterprising, gradually begin to cultivate water-rice which fetches a good price in the market.

### Oilseeds

First in importance of all oilseeds is sesame (*til*, *Sesamum indicum*). It is sown at the beginning of the monsoon like any other grain, i.e., broadcast. The shoots must be weeded out when they are about six inches high. The plants should grow at least a hand's breadth from each other. Weeding is required only once or twice.

When the crop is ripe, the stalks are cut and tied into bundles which are left to dry on the threshing floor (*kanihar*). When dry, the buds open and the seeds fall out. Then the grain having been cleaned and winnowed is stored at home in a small bin.

Each house in eastern Mandla has an oil-press (*kolhu*). When oil is required, a man fills a string basket (*pitla*, plaited of thin strings of *wodar* bark) with sesame. He covers the mouth of the basket and ties the cover firmly down. Now a heavy beam, more than ten feet long and at least a foot thick, is placed in the courtyard. On this beam, the man places a flat wooden pan, pear-shaped. Along the brim of the pan runs a groove, the escape for the oil. The basket with the sesame is placed on the slightly concave inner side of the wooden pan. Then another heavy beam is placed on the pan, parallel to the lower beam. Both beams are tied together at one end with a strong rope. The other end of each beam is kept wide apart by the bulge which the basket containing the oilseed forms on the pan. Now this end also is tied together with a strong rope which is twisted around with a pole inserted between the rope. In this manner the oil is pressed out and flows in the groove along the brim of the pan into a pot which is placed at the mouth of the pan.

The oil-cake which remains, the so-called *kalli*, is either sold or fed to the buffalo cows. Bullocks are rarely fed with oil-cakes.

Another oilseed is *ramtila* (*Guzotia abyssinica*). It is also called *jagni*. It is sown in heavy as well as in light soil, either mixed with *kodo* or alone. Sowing time is the month of *Srawan* (July). *Ramtila* is not a selling crop; the seed is kept for home use. It is pressed in the same manner as sesame.

*Ramtila* is often threshed one bundle after the other with



a short cudgel. Though this oilseed is more productive than sesame, it is gradually being abandoned for the latter, because sesame oil is more tasty.

Linseed (*Linum usitatissimum*) is a very profitable winter crop. But it is delicate and easily damaged by frost or rust which attacks the crop in cloudy weather. It is a crop that also grows in light soil. A linseed field looks beautiful when in flower. The flower is either blue or white.

### *Millet*

*Juar* (*Andropogon sorghum*), a millet which is so popular among the non-tribal farmers of the other districts in Central India, is not grown in such large quantities by the aboriginals of eastern Mandla. As it does not grow well in poor soil, it is sown in a small corner of the field which has rich soil. Each seed is sown about a foot apart from the other.

*Juar* grows best in black soil which the farmers of eastern Mandla need for *kodo* and paddy. It also suffers when the rainfall is heavy, since the heavy stalks do not get the necessary hold in the yielding soil. For this reason, *juar* is never sown in a freshly-ploughed field. Only where shifting cultivation is still permitted, is *juar* sown in larger quantities.

Gond and Bhumia are not very fond of *juar* bread. Their stomach, used to lighter food like *kodo* and *kutki*, does not easily digest the heavy *juar* flour.

*Juar* is a monsoon crop.

### *Wheat*

Few Gond and Bhumia have land suitable for wheat cultivation. Since wheat (*Triticum sativum*) is not irrigated, it grows only as a winter crop in moist black soil. Wherever there is a patch of field suitable for wheat cultivation, it is kept fallow during the monsoon and ploughed as often as the rains permit. The time of sowing is the end of October or the beginning of November. A rain, soon after the sowing—which is done by drill-plough in curved rows—is good for the crop. Rain is expected also at the end of the year when the wheat begins to flower. In the clear nights of the cold season, there is a heavy fall of dew which also helps to keep the field moist.

Sometimes wheat is grown mixed with gram (*chana*), or alternately wheat one year, gram the next. The wheat crop in eastern Mandla is rarely satisfactory; the farmers complain that the wheat is either attacked by rust (*girwa*), which is common in a season with excessive rain or cloudy weather, or killed by frosts in January or February. When the weather is fair and there is no rust, there might be a draught; or the animals of the jungle might destroy the farmer's hope of a rich harvest.

### Gram

When a plot of land is not sufficiently moist for wheat cultivation, though it may have a fairly rich soil, or if wheat had been sown the previous year, another grain is sown which is called *chana* (gram or chickpea, *Cicer arietinum*). Like wheat it is sown by the drill-plough (*nagar*) in slightly curved furrows which are close together.

Gram is much in demand for the carrier animals of the Labana (Banjara) and other castes who manage the traffic of grain in the hilly tracts.

### Flax

Flax (*san*, *Crotalaria juncea*) is sown by the farmers of eastern Mandla as a separate crop in a corner of the field. When it is ripe, the stalks are cut, tied into bundles and submerged in water for about ten days. Then they are taken out and the fibres cleaned of the sticky rotting marrow. The fibres are washed thoroughly and dried in the sun.

After some time, the fibres are spun into strings. A string is spun by means of a primitive whorl, consisting simply of two heavy wooden sticks tied crosswise. When a piece of new string has been spun, it is wound on the whorl, thus increasing its weight. The weight of the whorl keeps the thread tight and straight and prolongs the spin.

When all the flax fibres (*sutri*) have been spun into strings, the latter are spun into a rope or woven into sackcloth (*gonnia*). Sackcloth is in great demand in this part of the country, where all traffic is done by bullocks and ponies which carry grain and other goods in gunny bags slung across their



backs and hanging down on both sides. A single bag contains up to 100 or 120 litres of grain.

Almost in every village can be found a man who is in possession of a loom on which this sackcloth is woven. It is woven by hand, without a shuttle. While the weaving of other cloth is forbidden, Gond and Bhumia may weave sackcloth.

## CHAPTER VII

### HUSBANDRY

#### 1. CATTLE

IN THE past, when Gond and Bhumia practised shifting cultivation (*bewar*), they did not need cattle. The Gond seem to have been acquainted with cattle earlier than the Bhumia, who only recently adopted plough cultivation. Even now the Binjhar, another important sub-group of the Baiga tribe, do not yet employ bullocks for work and may not even coat their houses with cattle manure. Nowadays, many Gond and Bhumia keep bullocks for work and cows both for breeding purposes and for their milk, for unlike some non-tribals, they do not disdain from drinking cow's milk, either pure or with a dish of rice.

Gond and Bhumia have learned from the Hindus to call the cow *gaumata* (Mother Cow), but they do not regard the cow as a sacred animal or a goddess. For want of bullocks, they even yoke cows to the plough or harrow<sup>1</sup> unless they are with calf. The Gond, of course, who have been invested with the sacred thread (*janew*), are strictly prohibited from using cows as working animals. Also the tenants of Hindu landlords in many places are prevented by their masters from yoking cows to the plough or harrow. For some time the use of cows as draught animals was in fact generally forbidden by a solemn Gond and Bhumia caste council, but dire necessity has prompted both castes to go back on their decision, as bullocks are so scarce and fields could not be tilled without the use of cows. It goes without saying that cows employed in field-work quickly dry up and do not give calves.

<sup>1</sup> It is on record in the annals of the Garha Kings that Jhujhar Singh, the Raja of Orchha, started a holy war against the King of Garha-Mandla in Akbar's time, because the Gond used the sacred cow for ploughing and ate beef. Cf. E. Chatterton, (1916): p. 26.



The yield of milk in cows of eastern Mandla is very unsatisfactory. Cows give scarcely ever more than a pint or two a day. Bad breeds, the climate and general negligence in the matter of proper feeding, are responsible for this poor yield. While milking is in the main the task of men, in particular of the grazier (Ahir), women also are allowed to milk if they know how. Before milking, they tie the cow to a post, then tie the hind legs of the cow to prevent it from kicking. Then they allow the calf to drink. After a while they tie the calf to the left foreleg of the cow, and the milking starts. They milk from the left side. Holding the pot in the left hand or between the knees, they milk with the right hand. Half of the milk is left for the calf. The cow is not fed during milking.

The Bhumia are not permitted to yoke a bullock to a cart, though they may use bullocks as pack-animals. A Bhumia should not even sell a bullock to a man who is likely to use the animal for pulling a cart. The Gond have no such prejudice. Where they can make use of carts, on level roads, they readily use them. No Bhumia may pierce the nose of a bullock, while Gond have no scruples about doing it if they want to use a bullock as draught animal. In general, Gond and Bhumia treat their cattle well; they rarely beat their bullocks as much as the non-tribal farmers or curse them as roundly as the latter often do. However, neither do they take good care of their cattle. This negligence is due more to their ignorance in cattle-raising than lack of feeling for the animals. Even plough animals are rarely fed with anything better than grass; not even in periods of heavy work do they get cotton-seed or oil-cakes. The only extra food they get is a handful of grain or kitchen refuse. In front of the stable near the door is a trough, the hollow trunk of a tree, in which all the edible refuse is thrown. When the cattle and pigs return from grazing, they first feed from this trough and then enter the stable.

No wonder that the cattle in eastern Mandla always look half-starved. The breeds that thrive best in the rugged hills and steep valleys of eastern Mandla are short and slight. Better and larger kinds would not survive the poor feeding and general neglect accorded to cattle by the aborigines, and

they would soon lose their wind dragging the plough or harrow up and down in the uneven terrain which the aboriginal farmers prefer for their light millet crops.

Unlike the high-caste Hindus, Gond and Bhumia find nothing wrong in using bullocks as pack-animals. To pack a bullock, they first spread an old thin cloth, often a discarded loin-cloth, on its back. Over it they spread a flax-woven rough cloth. It is called *palan*. Over the cloth they arrange the *gonnia*, a large bag which hangs down at both sides of the animal. Anything, but mainly grain, is carried in these bags, for the hilly nature of the Baiga tracts makes traffic by carts impossible.

Bull-calves are trained to the plough or harrow as soon as they are considered strong enough for such work. The bull is castrated when about a year old. Several men get hold of the animal and tie its legs securely. Some hold the head down to the ground while one man draws the tail between the hind legs of the animal and holds it fast, for no bull can rise if its tail is held in such a manner. A grain-pestle (*musar*) is placed under the membrum of the bull, which is then hammered with the blunt end of the adze (*basula*) till the spermatiduct is crushed and the testicles become quite soft. They take good care that the grain-pestle and the adze are quite clean when used for this operation, to prevent infection. After the operation, the animal is let loose. The bull (*natiwa*) has become a bullock (*bail*).

There is also another method of castration: two clean sticks are tied together at one end. The testicles of the bull are then taken between the two sticks and crushed by hammering against the wood till they become quite soft.

The Gond and Bhumia have an interesting method of making obstinate bullocks work. If a bullock is accustomed to sit down, they tie a dog behind the plough. The dog, unused to being tied up, makes frantic attempts at getting loose, jumps to the right and left, barks and whines and frightens the bullock so much that it rises and willingly draws the plough.

Bullocks are given names which denote certain peculiarities of the animals. A bullock with black circles around the eyes is called *kajra*; a white bullock *dhaura*; a brown cow is called



*kosi*. A bullock with a white line down the middle of the forehead is called *tikla*, a black cow *kali*, a black and white spotted cow *lila*. A bullock without horns is *munda*, a bullock with horns pointing backwards is *chapra*, one with horns hanging down at both sides of the head is called *bhera*, a cow with horns curling just above the eyes is *korri*. A bullock with red and white spots is called *ghabra*.

Gond and Bhumia consider bullocks with hanging or curled horns as unlucky; but such defects do not prevent the owners from keeping the animals once they have grown like that. However, no Gond or Bhumia wants a cow or bullock whose tail is so long that it touches the ground. They believe that after its death such an animal causes the death of all the other cattle in the house; it sweeps them out of the house with its tail like a broom. This belief is shared by the non-tribal agriculturists of the district.

There is great scarcity of working bullocks among the Bhumia of eastern Mandla, less so among the Gond. At the village Bijora near Dindori, for instance, we find 27 Bhumia families, many of them joint families. They share among themselves only 28 bullocks. One Bhumia is the owner of three pairs of bullocks, some of one pair, the rest of the Bhumia own one bullock or none at all. One of my informants, Musra by name, has a bullock and a cow, but the animals are used for field work also by his two brothers who have no cattle of their own. Another Bhumia, with three married sons, owns three bullocks. This situation is typical for other villages, too. No wonder that many aborigines look back with nostalgia at the happy days when they were permitted to cut *bewar* for which no bullocks are required.

Farmers whose bullocks have died or had to be sold are either compelled to rent out their own fields and themselves look for work as field servants, or they must hire bullocks from their landlords or other wealthy farmers. The custom of borrowing bullocks for a season is quite common in eastern Mandla, and wealthy farmers and landlords make huge profits by lending out their superfluous bullocks. The use of one bullock for one season costs as much as 30 *kuru* (150 seers or litres) of grain. During the war as much as three *khandi*

(300 litres) had to be paid because the price of cattle had increased considerably. The rent of one bullock for one season is equivalent to about one-fourth or one-third of the price of a bullock. If the crops fail and the rent cannot be paid in grain, it may be postponed till the next harvest, plus 25 per cent interest. Sometimes a cow or calf is given instead of grain, or the debt is worked off. It is cheaper to borrow animals yet untrained for work; before the war a man paid five *kuru* of grain for such an animal, now it is 25 *kuru*.

Bullocks are rented out in the month of *Phag* (March) and must be returned on *Rakhi* (in August). They are again rented out in the month of *Karttik* (October), and returned in the month of *Pus* (December). The rent for the shorter winter season is slightly lower; about 25 *kuru* of wheat and gram mixed together.

The whole system of renting bullocks is called *buhi*.

Contrary to the Gond who in former times generally, and at present at least in some villages, still eat beef, the Bhumia maintain stoutly that they never ate beef. This is probably correct, as the Bhumia were the last to abandon *bewar* cultivation for which no cattle were required. When they were compelled to acquire bullocks for plough cultivation, the Hindu aversion to beef-eating had already taken root among them.

Apparently there is no cross-breeding of domestic cattle and wild bison. Nor have Gond or Bhumia been able to catch bison calves alive and rear them as domestic cattle. It is not sure whether any attempt has ever been made to do this.

## 2. BUFFALOES

Only the wealthier among the Gond, and a few Bhumia, keep buffaloes. These animals are out all day grazing under the supervision of the village herdsman (*Ahir*). The buffaloes are generally not given any special fodder; sometimes they are fed the leavings of a meal or the water in which the women washed their cooking pots.

Buffalo cows give, when in calf, about five litres (*seer*) of milk a day. It is the *Ahir*'s job to milk the cows twice a day, morning and evening. But if for some reason the *Ahir* is



prevented from milking, the Gond and Bhumia do it themselves. Even women are allowed to milk, contrary to the custom of the non-tribal farmers.

Male buffaloes are rarely kept by Gond and Bhumia. They have no use for them, as these animals are not fit for field work in the hilly and dry ground of eastern Mandla. Male buffalo calves are therefore neglected and allowed to die.

The milk of the buffalo is kept for butter, though nowadays a few Gond and even some Bhumia have acquired the habit of drinking tea for which they require some milk. But generally all milk is kept for the preparation of butter. The milk is boiled and then allowed to cool. After some time the cream is taken off. When in a few days sufficient cream has been collected and has become sour by adding a little old curd (*dahi*) it is churned in an earthen pot. The churn is made of a bamboo stick whose lower end is split and held apart by two short splints inserted crosswise. The milk pot is placed near the wall of the house or on the veranda, the top of the churning stick being set in a hoop of rope fastened to the wall, while another rope is slung around the middle of the churn. By pulling alternately at one or the other end of this rope the churn is turned in the milk. When the butter has settled around the churning stick, it is removed and clarified by boiling; it is never used without being boiled first. Clarified butter not only serves well for all kinds of cooking purposes, but keeps better than butter and can be preserved for about a year without getting too rancid.

Butter is called *nauna*, clarified butter *ghee*. The butter milk left after churning is served at meal time with the porridge of *kodai* or rice, or with a dish of vegetables. Milk with the butter in it is called *dahi*, without it *matha*. Both Gond and Bhumia are very fond of sour milk, with or without butter, and often give some away to people who have no buffaloes. With *matha* the women prepare a dainty dish which is much relished: they boil it with *kodai* until the grain is dissolved. This is called *maheri* and is very sour. Milk boiled so long that it solidifies is called *khir*.

The Bhumia of eastern Mandla are not permitted to eat the meat of buffaloes though they may eat bison or blue bull meat.

Nor are they allowed to skin a dead buffalo. They may not even accept money for the hide, or shoes, from the Chamar (caste of skinners and leather-workers) who skinned their dead cattle and buffaloes. The Gond, on the other hand, are not so squeamish in this matter. They welcome the money or shoes which the Chamar offers for the hides of their animals and, in the past at least, though rarely in present days, also used to eat buffalo meat.

There is no objection to eating the meat of deer or to skinning wild animals; even the Bhumia are allowed to do it. The prohibition only applies to domesticated animals. The reason why the Bhumia are more severe than the Gond in the observance of these caste rules is probably that at the time of their introduction to Hinduism they had not yet eaten beef or buffalo meat. The Gond find it more difficult to abstain from beef and buffalo meat, because they had been used to eating it for a much longer time. The Bhumia find abstention from pork just as hard as the Gond, as they had obviously been eating it from time immemorial. And though they would gain much in social prestige if they gave up eating pork, since both high-caste Hindus and Muslims abhor it, they ever and again revert to rearing pigs and eating pork.

### 3. Pigs

The pig (*sura*) appears to be a typical domestic animal of both Gond and Bhumia. It is an integral element in their peculiar form of economy which combines primitive agriculture with an extensive use of jungle produce. In such an environment the pig thrives best.

Rearing pigs is very inexpensive. In the morning the pigs are let loose to roam about the village and to eat up all the refuse they can find. After a while the animals are brought home and locked up in the pig-sty, a small shed made of stout planks, covered with a roof of sticks and leaves and surrounded by a strong fence. The pig-sty is usually built in the corner where two huts meet at a right angle. At noon and in the evening, the pigs are fed the husks of *kodo* and *kutki*, kitchen refuse and leavings of the last meal. At night the pigs are



carefully locked up, for panthers and tigers relish their meat as much as the Gond and Bhumia.

At a public dinner, on the occasion of a wedding, of a funeral feast, at a caste meeting, or when several men have gathered to work in *begar* (labour for the landlord or the Government without pay), Gond and Bhumia expect a dish of pork. Pork is eaten with boiled rice (*bhat*) and pulse (*dar*). Everyone, men, women and children, may eat pork. But sometimes, as can be noticed also in other castes and tribes, a man or woman is allergic to pork. Such persons are served chicken at a public dinner instead of pork. While Hindu reformers have tried very hard to make Gond and Bhumia give up rearing pigs and eating pork, they have had very little success so far. In several caste meetings, the law was issued that henceforth pigs would be taboo; however, both Gond and Bhumia soon reverted to eating pork. It should likewise be mentioned that while some clans made the eating of goat's meat, or the meat of other animals taboo, no clan has ever forbidden the eating of pork. It is as if the meat of the domesticated pig was considered so important that it could not be subjected to such clan restrictions.

When a pig is slaughtered, a portion of the meat is prepared for immediate consumption; the rest is cut into small thin slices and dried in the sun. Such dried preserves, however, do not keep long, at least not in the hot season. This is an excuse to eat pork as long as it lasts.

A small pig is killed by taking it by the hind legs and beating its head against a big boulder or beam. A full-grown pig is killed with the spear (*barchhi*) or with the axe (*pharsa*). The body is then carried to the garden behind the house where the hairs are singed off over a slow fire. The back-hair, however, is plucked, for it fetches a good price in the market. Domar (professional pig breeders) buy the bristles (*jhundia*) and sell them to handloom weavers who require them for the seizing of the woof. When the pig has been singed, it is washed in hot water and then cut up with the *pharsa*. The meat is cut into small pieces and thrown into a big pot of boiling water which is spiced with salt, turmeric (*hardi*) and coriander (*dhanya*).

A pig is cut up and cooked by men, not by women. Also the rice for a pork dinner must be prepared by men. At home, however, when the meal is prepared for a private family, the women of the house are permitted to do the cooking. The aborigines eat not only the meat, but also the intestines (*bota*) after they have been cleaned; the skin, the head, and even the bones are crushed and split open to remove the marrow. The heart, the liver and the stomach are considered particularly good food. Only the feet are cut off and thrown away.

Pigs are frequently offered in sacrifice to *Bhainsasur* by beating their heads against the skull of a water buffalo, to *Narayan deo* by suffocating them or by crushing their bodies with a beam. However, sucklings may not be sacrificed. For every sacrifice, grain is thrown before the victims; if they eat it they are considered acceptable to the god, otherwise another animal must be found.

Because the eating of pork is very objectionable in the eyes of Muslims and high-caste Hindus, the more Hinduised Gond are now supposed to abstain from eating pork. But the Bhumia do not seem inclined to give it up. Some thirty years ago, in 1930, the Bhumia also were persuaded by social reformers to forbid the rearing of pigs and the drinking of liquor, and indeed at a general caste meeting they decided to make this prohibition a strict rule of the caste. But after a few years the Bhumia quietly reverted to their former habits of eating pork and drinking liquor. In some villages of eastern Mandla this prohibition had never been accepted. At present, most of the Bhumia drink as much as ever and openly raise pigs for home consumption and even for sale. The Gond also, even those who wear the sacred thread (*janew*) as a symbol of their Hindu orthodoxy, have again begun to eat pork. Most of them, though, still abstain from keeping pigs. When they feel hungry for pork, they buy a pig from a Bhumia. They will often buy a young animal and give it to a Bhumia to rear. When it is just right for the meal, it is killed and the meat divided between the owner and the keeper. This system is called *adhya*; or else the pig is sold and the price divided equally between the two.



Gond and Bhumia of course eat the meat of the wild boar (*jungli sura*). Unlike the women of other aboriginal tribes like the Korku, Gond and Bhumia women are not excluded from eating the meat of the wild boar. When such an animal has been killed, it is singed on the spot over a slow fire and cut up into small pieces. The liver and the heart (*beti*) must be boiled and eaten then and there by the hunters. The rest of the meat may be taken home and prepared in the house.

Domestic pigs in eastern Mandla differ little from wild pigs, except in size. Wild pigs are larger, and wild boars have better developed tusks. Both are black, or white with large black spots, and on the whole rather small. The domestic pigs of the Gond and Bhumia are most probably of the same stock as the wild pigs. Even today, when hunters catch young pigs alive, they rear them with domestic pigs without great difficulty. Such pigs distinguish themselves in no way from the others.

#### 4. HORSES

Possession of a horse is a sign of wealth. It can only be used for a ride to the market or a trip to another village. Otherwise it is of no use, since horses are never employed in field-work or as pack-animals. Gond and Bhumia are excellent walkers, and need no horse for a journey to a distant village. But village headmen often keep a horse or pony (*tattu*), to show off.

In former times it was forbidden for Bhumia to ride horses. Nowadays this regulation is no more in force, but few Bhumia keep horses. Sometimes, when a wealthy man on some special occasion makes them a present of a filly, they may keep and rear it.

When a horse dies in the stable, the body is removed by the owner. But no Gond or Bhumia is permitted to skin a dead horse or eat horse meat. My informants did not know what would happen to the man who killed a horse. They had never heard of such a thing. Horse dung is collected by the Gond and Bhumia for their gardens.

## 5. SHEEP AND GOATS

Only a few Gond and Bhumia keep goats (*bokra*). They are grazed by the Ahir who leads them out with the cattle. But as goats are often attacked by panthers and other wild animals, few people care to keep them.

The price of a goat is five *kuru* of grain.

While cows and she-buffaloes are milked by the Ahir, goats are milked by their owner. But in any case a goat is milked only if there is more milk than her kids can drink. As a rule, Gond and Bhumia do not drink goats' milk; they pour it into the same pot together with buffalo milk to make butter. Small babies, however, whose mothers have died or are unable to suckle them are raised on goats' milk.

Male goats only, and such she-goats which have not yet borne, may be offered in sacrifice. Kids cannot be sacrificed as long as they suckle. In any sacrifice, except in some places in the *laru kaj*, a goat may be substituted for a pig or chicken. The skin of a goat slaughtered in sacrifice may not be sold; it is cut up after the hair has been singed off and boiled and eaten with the meat.

Apart from sacrificial meals, goats' meat is eaten on most festive occasions when pork is not available. After the pig and the fowl, the goat is the favourite sacrificial animal of the aborigines in eastern Mandla. Nowadays goats' meat often takes the place of pork in wedding and caste dinners, since there are always some among a big crowd who object to pork. In order to avoid any embarrassment, goats' meat is served for all instead of pork, which some might refuse to eat.

Sheep are generally not kept by Gond and Bhumia. These animals are reared by a special caste, the Gareria. But both Gond and Bhumia have no objection to eating mutton, which they consider as good as goats' meat.

On rare occasions, sheep may be offered in sacrifice in place of goats: when the magician (*panda* or *gunia*) performs a sacrifice in honour of *Marhai mata* on the *maria*.



## 6. POULTRY

All Gond and Bhumia are breeders of poultry. Fowls and chickens are locked up for the night, usually in the house, and let loose in the morning. They are not specially fed, but find plenty of food around the house and garden.

The kind of fowls which the Gond and Bhumia raise are generally healthy. Chickens are set throughout the year, since the eggs are not eaten, but kept for hatching. Bhumia women are under no condition allowed to eat eggs. The eggs of other birds, too, are taboo for them. This restriction however does not apply to the Gond women. But even the Gond eat eggs only when a hen refuses to hatch and the eggs would otherwise get spoiled. Eggs can be sold. Money from sale of eggs is reserved exclusively for the mistress of the house.

Chicken meat is a favourite dish on feast days. It is usually served when a guest arrives. Before chicken meat is served, it is customary to offer a glass of liquor to the guests. Gond and Bhumia, however, do not drink liquor during the meal, as do the Lamanias, a caste of carriers in the district.

After goats, fowls are the usual victims for a sacrifice. Cocks are much in preference as victims, then chickens of yet undetermined sex. A cock or a small chicken is offered in sacrifice when a goat or pig would be too expensive.

## 7. THE DOG

While in the non-tribal villages of the plains dogs abound, comparatively few dogs are found in the hamlets of the aborigines near the forest, where panthers and other wild animals keep the number of dogs down. In the villages near the jungle, dogs have a chance to survive only if they keep close to the houses during the day and are shut in at night. Naturally, special care is taken of dogs required for guarding the fields and for hunting small deer, rabbits and pigs. Such dogs are specially trained.

The dog (*kukra*) of the Gond and Bhumia has a reddish-brown coat, a thin tail with an upward curl, and hanging ears.

Though the Gond and Bhumia would not kill a dog, except a mad dog, nor eat its meat, they do not regard dogs as unclean animals and have no difficulty in removing the body of a dead dog from the house.

In the hot season, cases of rabies are rather frequent, and then dogs become a danger to the people. The Bhumia have the strange belief that when a person is bitten by a rabid dog, small dogs appear in his stomach. A Bhumia woman firmly maintained that she saw small dogs pass in the urine of her son who had been bitten by a mad dog.

In the jungle around the Maikhal Hills, wild dogs are not rare. These wild dogs (*Kuon rutilans* or *Cyon dukhunensis*) are called *sonha* or *son-kutta* by the people because of their golden yellow coat. Only their muzzles are black; their tails are bushy and hanging. Wild dogs do not bark, they whine. They eat anything, animals, carrion, vegetables, and occasionally also one of their own kind killed in a fight. Wild dogs hunt in packs of ten to twenty; they are rarely found single or in lesser numbers. These dogs have unfailing scent and unlimited endurance; once they get on the track of a deer and follow it, the animal is doomed. They chase it till it is tired out and cornered for the last fight. It is believed that a pack of wild dogs is a match even for a tiger, who sneaks away when wild dogs appear in his beat. Wild dogs are very destructive to game and cattle; all wild animals of the jungle leave their grazing grounds when a pack of wild dogs appears in the neighbourhood.

When wild dogs hunt a deer, a *sambhar* or *nilgai* for instance, they try to encircle it by cutting off the way of escape. They never give up a chase once the animal is in sight. When the victim cannot run any more and turns for the last fight, the dogs—so a Bhumia told me—urinate on their bushy tails which they take between their hind legs. Then they flick their dripping tails in the eyes of the animal which, momentarily blinded, falls an easy prey to their ferocity. Wild dogs begin devouring their victim even before they have killed it. They tear whole chunks of flesh out of the hind-part of the living animal and often eat up half of the intestines before the victim dies. After a few minutes no traces are left of the prey; the Bhumia say



that these dogs devour even the bones.

Gond and Bhumia never kill a wild dog, because they believe that the rest of the pack would take a terrible revenge and never rest till it has hunted down the killer, killed and devoured him, his wife and his children, and all his cattle. Unless provoked, wild dogs do not attack man.

### 8. THE CAT

Cats (*billi*) are not fed by the Gond and Bhumia. They are inclined to regard them as rather a nuisance. Small kittens are sometimes given milk and treated as pets. Full-grown cats are supposed to find their food around the house and in the village. In the opinion of the Gond and Bhumia, cats are not of much use. They do kill rats, which at times the Bhumia, too, catch and eat, but sometimes also kill chickens and other useful animals.

## CHAPTER VIII

# HUNTING AND FISHING

### 1. HUNTING

#### (a) Big Game

THE JUNGLE of eastern Mandla abounds in big game. Among the beasts of prey there is above all the tiger (*bagh* or *sher*). In the religion of the Gond, the tiger (*Felis tigris*) plays a prominent part as a clan-god, while the Bhumia have a complicated ritual for the placation of a man-eating tiger. The panther (*chita*, *Felis pardus*) does much harm to goats, pigs and dogs, and is said to be more bloodthirsty than the tiger. The tiger kills for food; the panther for the lust of killing. Less dangerous is the leopard (*tendua*, *Felis leopardus*). Gond and Bhumia rarely hunt these wild animals, but if they are attacked they defend themselves with great courage. The hyena (*Hyaena striata*) and the wolf (*bheriya*, *Canis lupus*) are quite frequent in the hills, but usually too shy to do much harm. The jackal (*kolha*, *Canis aureus*), which is found everywhere, is the common enemy of ill-protected poultry. It becomes dangerous to man and beast when affected with rabies, which is not a rare thing in the hot season.

Great damage is done to the crops by the wild boar (*dukar*) which abound in number and roam about in every patch of the jungle. They break into every field that is not well guarded and devastate it. Herds of monkeys are common and do their share of damage to the crops, the more so as they are not hunted, but only chased away.

Eastern Mandla is rich in deer; the following species are the most common: *sambhar* (*Cervus equinus* and *Cervus duvanceli*), swamp-deer (*bara-singh*), spotted deer (*chithal*, *Cervus axis*), *gutri* (*Cervulus muntjac*) or *ghotri*, the antelope (*hiran*, *Antilope cervicapra*) which is frequently trapped, the blue bull (*nilgai*, *Bos tragocamelus*), the barking deer (*chau-*



*singha*) with four horns. Less common is the *chinkhara* (*Gasella bennettii*).

Gond and Bhumia rarely hunt together. Beats are usually organized by the respective hamlets, and Gond and Bhumia always live in separate hamlets (*tola*). The methods of hunting differ in these two tribes.

In former times, the weapons for the hunting of big game, beasts of prey and big deer, were the spear (*barchhi*) for the Gond, bow and arrow for the Bhumia. It is said that in the past the Bhumia were not afraid to face the tiger with their bows and poisoned arrows. But in present times such hunting has been made unlawful by the Government, which punishes even possession of a spear, or of a bow and arrow. This is the reason why such weapons are now rarely seen in the houses of the Gond and Bhumia. Only in remote villages where forest guards are far away, do the aboriginal settlers occasionally revert to their traditional manner of living and hunt on the sly. Some Gond, rarely ever a Bhumia, have a muzzle-loader which they may use in their own fields. Sometimes a man with a passion for hunting may be able to borrow one.

A hunter, Gond or Bhumia, who shoots an animal with his rifle, gives a hind leg to the owner of the weapon. One or two pounds of meat are given away to each family of the hamlet where he lives. The village headman and the village watchman (*kotwar*) get several pounds of the shoulder. If the hunter has a companion on his trip, he gives him a foreleg. The rest is his.

Hunting with beaters is called *kheda* or *hakha*. The man who shoots an animal gets a hind leg, the head, the skin and the horns. The owner of the gun receives a hind leg. The rest is divided into equal parts among the beaters. Even if there are twenty or thirty men in the beat, each one gets his share however small.

When a tiger or bear has been killed, the meat is not eaten; only the skin is taken and, from the tiger, the teeth and whiskers. Tiger fat is a popular medicine for rheumatism.

Big deer, and sometimes tigers and panthers, are caught in traps. Traps are more a speciality of the Bhumia; the Gond

rarely use them. A Gond told me that they rarely build traps because they do not know the magic incantations by which the Bhumia entice game to step into the trap.

Traps (*phanda*) for big game are made in the following manner: A long, narrow and deep pit is dug. It must be at least ten to twelve feet long, only three feet broad and six to eight feet deep. The lower the pit, the narrower it gets. When the animal falls into the pit it is unable to turn round. This pit is dug at a place which deer frequent or on the path which they use when going to a place of water. The pit is covered with a few planks, grass and twigs. Then a fence is erected at both sides of the pit, each about a hundred yards long. Just in front of the pit the fence is much lower. The wild animals, driven by beaters against the fence, find the low spot in the fence and jump. They land right in the covered pit, break through and get stuck in the narrow hollow of the pit. Such a trap is called *agar phanda*. A fall trap, to kill small animals like porcupines, is called *kutis*.

The Gond when hunting in a group often do so with nets. Large nets made of strong ropes are used for large deer, and smaller nets for rabbits, hares, and lesser game. These nets are spread between suitably placed trees and poles erected for the purpose. Then a beat is made towards the nets. Any animal caught in the net is killed with the axe (*pharsa*). Sometimes even a panther gets caught in a large net and is despatched in the same manner. When the Gond are in a group they are not afraid of any animal. Only bears, bisons and wild dogs are left alone. These animals are too dangerous to be hunted with such inadequate weapons. But a Gond with a muzzle-loader, or a Bhumia with his bow and poisoned arrows, will attack even a bear or bison. Wild dogs, however, are always left alone.

Some Gond and Bhumia train their dogs to chase wild boar or big deer during a beat. Other dogs are trained to catch and kill small deer and rabbits.

Since the jungle tribes of Mandla District have been deprived of their traditional weapons and rarely get permission to keep a muzzle-loader, they are now unable to hunt tigers and panthers. Man-eating tigers are indeed not infrequent in the



wilder tracts and take quite a toll of lives annually. More often it is their cattle which fall prey to the tiger, and many calves, goats and dogs are killed every year by panthers. While in former times the jungle dwellers went out and hunted such animals which proved a danger for their cattle, nowadays they send their magicians to chase them away by magic. A special rite is performed when a person has been killed by a tiger.

The wild boar is hunted by Gond and Bhumia. Wild pigs are in abundance and are very destructive to the crops. These pigs make low grass nests in which they keep their young ones during the monsoon. It is dangerous to approach such a nest single-handed in the thick grass of the swamps; the hunters usually surround it in a crowd and send the dogs in to chase the pigs out. Then they fall in a group on the animal which comes their way and kill it with their hatchets and spears. The meat of the wild boar (*Sus cristatus*) is a favourite with Gond and Bhumia.

#### (b) *Small Game*

Small deer like the *chinkhara* and *ghotri*, rabbits, hares (*kharha*, *Lepus timidus*) are often hunted with nets (*jal*). While the flesh of the big animals is distributed among the beaters who each get their equal share—they take it home to have it prepared by their wives for the whole family—smaller animals when caught are cooked on the spot and eaten by all the men of the party. It is a rule that a man who by chance comes upon such a party must be invited to join the meal.

Rabbits are often hunted at night with a light and bell. Two men are required for this hunt, which is called *gotiyari*. The man walking in front carries a lamp covered with a shade in such a way that the light escapes through a narrow slit. When the man rings his bell, the rabbits are attracted by the sound. As they cross the path illuminated by the narrow slit in the shade of the lamp, the man behind shoots.

Occasionally, small deer and rabbits when encountered by chance are killed with stones or are knocked down with a stick or with the axe which every Gond and Bhumia carries on his shoulder when he goes to the jungle or to his field.

The axe or the stick is often thrown with great skill and precision.

Small deer, rabbits and birds are caught in baited nooses attached to bent saplings or stakes. These traps are called *dalnga phanda*. Other traps consist of heavy beams or stone slabs erected over the bait. When the animals take the bait, the trap collapses on them. Such traps are called *bhar phanda*.

### (c) Birds

The birds which the Gond and Bhumia hunt are mainly: the partridge (*Francolinus pictus*), gray partridge (*Ortygornis pondicerinus*), green pigeon (*harrel*), blue pigeon (*kabutar*), red jungle fowls, bush quail (*Perdica asiatica*) and rain quail, sand grouse, snipe and duck (except the Brahmani duck, *Casarea vertilia*, which is sacred). Snipe revel in the swamps and paddy patches near a river. Peafowls (*mor*), which are sometimes harmful to the crops, are eagerly hunted for their plentiful and delicious meat.

Small birds are caught in snares and traps, or with bird-lime. For bird-lime (*chhep*), the jungle tribes use the sap of the *thuha* shrub (*Euphorbia tirucalli*). The sticky juice is mixed with *ramtila* oil and smeared on branches and twigs of the trees on which the birds are used to perch. Their feet get stuck in the sticky mass. When they begin to beat about with their wings in an attempt to get off the tree, their wings also get stuck and they fall off the tree unable to fly away. Then they are caught by the men hiding under the tree.

There are certain kinds of birds which may not be killed, as for instance, sparrows. They belong to the house. Nor may parrots be killed; they can 'talk'. Owls are spared because their meat has a bad taste. Vultures and kites are never killed for food, because they eat carrion. But the Bhumia shoot vultures for the feathers which they require for their arrows.

Birds, and small animals like rats and mice, are often hunted by boys who try to hit them with slings (*gulel*) or simply by throwing stones or sticks at them. Often they also lay traps. A bamboo mat or wooden board is held up at one side by a thin stick that falls at the slightest touch. Grains are scattered around and beneath the board. As soon as the bird



or other animal touches the stick holding up the board, the stick snaps and the animal is caught under the board. Often a heavy stone is placed on the board to hold the animal down more effectively. Sometimes a string is tied to the stick holding up the board. When a bird finds its way into the trap, a boy hiding nearby pulls the string and brings down the trap. Snares are sometimes arranged in the same manner.

## 2. FISHING

While the game laws of the Forest Department are severe and are strictly enforced, fishing in the rivers and ponds is free. The Gond and Bhumia take the utmost advantage of this freedom. At all times of the year, but particularly in the hot season and at the beginning of the monsoon, they go fishing. Fish is always a welcome change in their monotonous and meagre diet. The rivers and streams of eastern Mandla abound in fish and promise a never-failing reward for relatively little effort. Fishing is less popular in the cold season when the water is too chilly and the fisherman is likely to catch a cold or to get rheumatism.

The commonest kinds of fish are: *khusha*, *saur* (a tasty and delicious fish found only in the deep pits of large rivers), the *rohu*, *nain*, *karot*, *bam* (eel), *gegra* (without scales) and the *katia*.

At the beginning of the monsoon, after the first heavy rain showers, the whole country is flooded. The rivers overflow, the dry streambeds and *nala* are full, waterholes turn into ponds and ponds into lakes. This is the time when the fish wander from the big rivers upwards into little rivulets and streams, high up in the mountains. When, after the first rain, a spell of fair weather sets in and the water subsides, fish are often caught in small waterholes. This is the chance for the jungle dwellers who at that time leave their field-work and go fishing. In the scantiest attire they are out the whole day in a heavy downpour, or splash about in the warm water to reap in the rich bounty which the oncoming monsoon provides.

One method of fishing is to go to a small waterhole in a

flooded field or forest place. When the water subsides after a few days of fair weather, some fishes and crabs remain in the waterhole. To catch these one or two women go with two baskets and a fish trap (*ghusur* or *katta*). They set up the trap—a funnel-shaped wickerwork tied together at the tapering end—at the brim of the waterhole. The trap is firmly wedged in between heavy logs of wood or boulders to prevent it from being swept away by the force of the water which is poured into the trap from the waterhole. With a shallow basket (*mora*) whose inside is coated with cow-dung or white clay (*chuhi matti*) the water is baled out of the hole and poured into the trap. The water escapes through the wickerwork, but the small fishes and crabs are caught in the tapering top of the trap. If they try to escape through the open end of the trap, they are swept back into the bottom of the trap by the force of the following bucket of water that is poured into it.

Thus by ceaseless baling the waterhole is soon emptied. This work may be done by men, but more often by women and children. When the waterhole is empty, its nooks and corners are inspected for fishes and crabs hiding there. They are caught by hand, broken and thrown into the big basket over which the fish-trap is turned and emptied of its contents. About a pound of small fish and crabs is the usual catch after about an hour's vigorous baling.

During the rainy season mainly, but also at other times, Gond and Bhumia fish with nets (*jal*). These nets which the Dhimar, professional fishermen, knit from hemp strings have different forms. One net, a casting net, has a round shape, with lead balls or pebbles tied at regular intervals along the periphery. This net is held at the centre by the fisherman, swung over the head and then thrown into the water. Falling down it opens and covers a certain area of the river or pond. A string is pulled, the end of which is kept in hand when throwing the net. The net closes at the periphery, enclosing all fishes covered by the net. This net is used mainly in shallow water.

Another net has the shape of a big bag with a round bamboo hoop at the brim and a long bamboo pole tied across its mouth. This net is held against the current of the river and any



fishes caught in the net are held in it by the force of the onrushing water. This net is used with advantage in a swift-flowing river and in the muddy water of the early monsoon.

Again, another net has a rectangular shape. Its use requires the co-operation of several men; the bigger the net the more men are required. The net is spread in deep water against the current. One end is held right at the river bank while the other is slowly drawn across the river till it reaches its widest expanse. Then it is gradually drawn back in a wide circle. Care is taken that the fish caught in the net do not escape to the bottom of the river. The net is for this reason set with lead rings or pebbles which glide over the bottom of the river. When the net is shut, the fish are caught either in the network or in the nooks and holes of the riverside encircled by the net. The whole catch is distributed equally among the men who take part in the fishing.

In the hot season, when the rivers are almost dry and the water level reaches its lowest point, other methods are employed. At a river which still carries water, some men get together and build a fishing weir. Posts are rammed into the river bed at a suitable place where the river banks approach each other and force the water to a swifter flow. The posts serve as support for a sort of fencing which is made of stout planks. These planks are then covered with a wickerwork of branches and twigs, so tightly knit that no fish can pass through it. But a few holes are left into which funnel-shaped fish traps of split bamboo are set. The fish, which at this time of the year are wandering down the rivers, are swept into these traps, and the sucking force of the funnel-shaped traps makes it impossible for the fish to turn back and escape. Often these traps are built in such a way that bamboo splints are fixed inside which give way when a fish enters but hold it back when it tries to escape.

Fishing is also done by poisoning the water. For poison they use a concoction of the bark of *Tinsa* (*Ougenia dalbergensis*) or the leaves of the *Tondru* tree (*Caesarea graveolus*). The leaves are pounded to a pulp and a basketful of it is sunk into the pond or stream first dammed; or the poison is simply thrown into the water. The fish are stupefied by the poison

and float on the surface of the water where they can easily be caught. This method of fishing is of course wasteful, as it kills the young fry and the immature fish which otherwise escape.

Hook fishing is not very common. Hooks are available at the local bazaar. As bait, the aborigines use worms or the entrails of chickens or small birds.

Even less common than hook fishing is shooting fish. It requires two men. One man patiently waits at the river bank or on a big boulder in the river till a fish approaches. He shoots at it with his gun and at once the other man jumps into the river to catch the fish which, if not killed outright, is at least stunned by the force of the explosion.

Some men are clever in catching fish by hitting them with a stick. They sit motionless in the water or on the river bank till a fish approaches. Like lightning they hit it with a blow that stuns it. Then they catch it with their hands.

Fishing is done alone, in small groups or in a crowd, just as the occasion demands. There is no strict distinction of the sexes in fishing; women fish by the side of men, but most often a whole family or even a whole family group sets out on a fishing trip. For the building of a weir the whole hamlet may be called upon.

Fishing is not only a manner of procuring necessary food—and a food which is a welcome change in the monotony of the ordinary diet—but a pleasurable sport in which the aboriginal gets a rich reward for the exercise of his mental and physical agility.

It goes without saying that the methods of fishing here described are not peculiar to the Gond and Bhumia. Other tribes as well, but above all the professional fishermen, the Dhimar, use all these methods in fishing.



PART II

SOCIOLOGY





## CHAPTER IX

### KINSHIP AND AFFINITY

THE ENDOGAMOUS tribal division which Bhumia as well as Gond call *biladeri* (brotherhood) or *jat* (breed) is sub-divided into exogamous family-groups which are organized in a two-fold manner. One system of relationship is by both tribes called *gotra* (family, parenthood) or *kur* (assembly, family), while the other is called *jat* or *kher* by the Bhumia, and *garh* by the Gond.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. THE KHER-SYSTEM OF THE BHUMIA

The social system which the Bhumia call *kher* ('site of an ancient village')<sup>2</sup>, is understood by them as a relationship of persons who once inhabited the same village. Even today, the members of one such group generally live in more or less compact groups in villages close together. They are in some vague sense conscious that they belong to one big family. Often the village from which they derive the name of their *kher* is still inhabited by members of the same *kher*.

It therefore appears likely that *kher* relatives once formed a regional unit; at the time when the Bhumia practised shifting cultivation, the members of a *kher* were probably in possession of a certain tract of land in which they shifted from site to site, as their peculiar form of cultivation required. In the course of time, overpopulation in the domain of a certain *kher* may have prompted some families to move into an area which was still unoccupied. The site of their new settlement may have belonged to another *kher*, which for some reason or other

<sup>1</sup> V. Elwin, (1939): p. 173 and *passim* calls the *kher* of the Baiga *garh*, which term around Dindori is only used by the Gond. The *gotra* he calls *goti*.

<sup>2</sup> *Kher* is also the *chabutra* in the village, a mud platform under a tree, where the stone figures of the village gods are put up.

had not increased at the same rate, or to a Gond or non-tribal landlord who was anxious to rent out his land to as many tenants as possible. He naturally did not care who tilled his land as long as taxes were paid. The *kher* thus ceased to be a compact social group in a certain area, since members of different *kher* began to settle in the same area. This naturally led to a confusion of the regional units. However, the original position is, at least in general lines, still recognizable.

Nowadays the Bhumia have a rather hazy knowledge of the history of their *kher*. We have a more definite knowledge only of such Bhumia *kher* whose members employ a genealogist (bard or Pardhan). It is the task of these genealogists to visit each village of their beat at least once a year and to recite there the history of the village's *kher*. The Tiljaria and Surajpuria *kher* of the Bhumia, for instance, have now Pardhans of their own who annually visit them and recite for a whole night the history of the *kher*. This custom is obviously of Gond origin. In return for this service, the Pardhan genealogist receives at the death of a man or woman of his *kher* the deceased's personal brass pot (*lota*) or plate (*thali*), and a silver armlet or even a *mohar* (gold) necklace, if the deceased owned one.

My Bhumia informant, Panga of Bijora, of the *kher* Sukha, knew some details of the history of his *kher*. It derives its name from a dried-up tank (*sukha*, dry) near the village Pali in Dindori *tahsil*. An ancestor of the *kher* lived as village priest (*dewar*) at Pali, a village mainly inhabited by Bharia Baiga, another, socially lower, sub-group of the Baiga. The Bharia, for some reason anxious to admit the Bhumia Dewar into their caste community, one day killed a calf—the Bharia eat beef—with the intention of making the Dewar eat beef either by deception or by force. They argued that the Dewar would be made an outcaste by his own caste fellows if he ate beef and would thus be forced to seek admission into the Bharia caste community. But it so happened that the Dewar's wife overheard the Bharia discussing their stratagem and warned her husband. The Dewar, with his wife and small son, hid in the house, and when the Bharia came and invited him for dinner, he replied that he had no time and was going



to the jungle to cut wood. Instead, he left the village with wife and child and settled near Bijora, from where his descendants in the course of time spread over several neighbouring villages. Neither he nor any of his descendants ever returned to Sukha.

Around Dindori we find the following Bhumia *kher*: Barangia, Bargaria Barhia, Bassania, Ghatia, Gopalpuria, Dongaria, Jhimur, Kamaria, Kachnaria, Khanduria, Kharhia, Kordaria, Kotaria, Kukaria, Koiraria, Mauhar, Murakia, Nandia, Nigunia, Pachgaiha, Rathoria, Saradia, Sarhia, Sarjania, Sukha, Surajpuria, Tiljaria, Timania, Thumia, and Udaria.

Most of these names are of villages near Dindori, and some of villages in the former Rewa State (Vindhya Pradesh), just beyond the border of Dindori *tahsil*. This would either suggest that the Bhumia have lived in this part of Mandla District from the beginning, or that they adopted the *kher* system only recently. We know from other traditions that the Bhumia are perhaps the earliest settlers of this area; on the other hand, the *kher* system has all the indication of high age. Though at present this social system does not play an important part in the life of the Bhumia, it may nevertheless be their eldest and perhaps the original system. The *kher* group is exogamous, but nowadays a breach of this marriage restriction is condoned if a fine is paid to the caste council of the village. It is quite in keeping with the general character of the regional unit system that as such it has no authority, while it is the caste council that watches over the observance of the laws of exogamy.

There are no indications of a totemistic origin of the *kher* system. The Bhumia do not worship any special *kher* gods—the gods whom they venerate under the name of *kher* gods (*kher deo*, village gods) have no connection with this social system. Nor do the Bhumia observe any *kher* taboos. Though the *kher* Kachnaria, for instance, is obviously called after the *kachnar* fruit (*Bauhinia variegata*), the members of this *kher* are not prohibited from eating the fruit. Likewise, the members of the *kher* Koilaria, called after a vegetable *koilar*, are in no wise held to avoid this plant. It is more probable

that the ancestral village of the *kher* was called after this plant.

The *kher* system is, to all appearances, nothing but the Bhumia version of territorial exogamy which is widespread in India and practised by many tribes and castes of this sub-continent. Like other tribes of similar cultural status, the Bhumia in all probability had originally only family exogamy, i.e. members of the same kin were prohibited from marrying each other. *Kher* and *gotra* exogamy are different things.

## 2. THE GARH SYSTEM OF THE GOND

The territorial system which the Bhumia call *kher* is known to the Gond by the name of *garh*.<sup>3</sup> *Garh* means literally 'fortress' in Hindi, 'citadel' or 'hill'. But it also signifies, or signified in the past,<sup>4</sup> a territorial unit. The modern term for a *garh* would be *tahsil* or *pargana*, or a sub-division of a *tahsil*, a *circle*.

Some of the Gond *garh* obviously derive their names from the forts and citadels which in former troubled times were manned by the Gond chiefs and their retainers, or from old village sites or hills which gave their names to the surrounding area to form a territorial unit called *garh*. The Gond clans and families living in a certain *garh* assumed the name of this territorial unit as their *garh* name. They retained this name even after leaving their original habitat and after settling elsewhere. They remembered their old *garh* when they had to lay the soul of a departed clan member to rest. For this had to be done in the ancestral home village.<sup>5</sup>

The name of the territorial group called *garh* may change. If members of a territorial group wander off and start a village at some distance from the ancestral home, they often choose for the last ceremony for the departed a site nearer to their present home. For some time they still retain their original *garh* name, but gradually forget it and adopt the

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Fuchs (1952): pp. 204-17.

<sup>4</sup> C. U. Wills (1919): Vol. XV, pp. 197-262. W. V. Grigson (1949): pp. 32, ff.

<sup>5</sup> L. F. van Helvert (1950): Vol. 5, pp. 221 f.



name of their new site as their *garh*. Members of the Maurawi clan at Junwani (over 50 miles from Mandla), for instance, had formerly to go to their *garh* Ramnagar near Mandla for their last funeral feast; now they go to Khatgaon which is only two miles from Junwani. Their clan priest lives there. The Maurawi of Dullopur (about 60 miles from Ramnagar) now go to Diawar which is only 20 miles from Dullopur. The clan priest of the Pandro lives ten miles, that of the Kolhia fifteen miles, from Junwani. The Markam of Junwani also used to go in former times to Mandla; now they go to Sakhwa, which is only eight miles distant. The Markam of Dullopur now go to Deohargarh, a hill two miles away; formerly they went to Damagarh near Mandla. They already call Deohargarh their *garh*, while the Maurawi still cling to their original *garh* name which is Garha-khota, i.e. Ramnagar near Mandla.

In a pamphlet, *Gond Dharm Purana* (The Story of the Gond Religion) the Gond Bhausingh Rajnegi of Balaghat District enumerates the following *garh* names of the Gond: Chanda-garh, Chinidhirigarh, Kaweligarh, Kareligarh, Sanjarugarh, Kuraigarh, Dewgarh, Bhainsagarh, Garh Saledongri, Sindaradehi Lohakodgarh, Amudagarh, Jamudagarh, Nagarkhana Radhapeti Bitligarh, Khara Khirrigarh, Dhamadagarh, Garha Mandla Ramnagar, Khanoragarh, Pratapgarh, Banathargarh, Jarrai-Batkagarh, Gangurwagarh.

Many of these place-names cannot be located anymore, but some of them are known to belong to villages, old forts and hills in Mandla District. One of my Gond informants, Bhagal of Bijora, could add to this list another *garh* name, his own. It is Kusumgarh. He believes that it is a place somewhere in Bhandelkhand, east of Mandla District. The village headman of Andhiako near Junwani also claimed that his ancestors came from the east, from the former Rewa State. But the great majority of the Gond in eastern Mandla locate their ancestral villages and places of worship at sites in the vicinity of Mandla town. That would suggest that they came from the west, and not from Bhandelkhand.

No doubt, like many aboriginal tribes of Central India, the Gond were also originally organized in exogamous territorial

groups.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of fact, this territorial group system is still fully in force among the Gond in Raipur District.<sup>7</sup> The fact that the last funeral ceremony for the departed is still performed by the Gond in the *garh* village, the original home of the ancestors, is an indication that the *garh* system is nothing but a territorial group system. However, with the arrival of so many immigrants and their usurpation of the land, originally owned by the aboriginal tribes, this territorial system was seriously disturbed. But it is still in force in the less accessible tracts of eastern Central India. Of the Khond (who are probably of the same racial stock as the Gond), Russell and Hiralal state that among them 'all members of one sept live in the same locality about some central village... The names of the septs are derived from the names of villages or from titles or nicknames.'<sup>8</sup> They practise village exogamy.

There is little doubt that this original territorial group system of the Gond was somewhat modified in the whole of Gondwana, and gradually developed into the present *garh* system through the influence of the Rajput soldiers and land-owners domiciled in the Gond area. And as the Rajput clans, which often enough are nothing else but territorial groups, relaxed the rules of exogamy with the increase in numbers and even turned into endogamous caste sections, so did the Gond territorial groups. In fact, *garh* exogamy is nowadays not strictly enforced; a marriage which offends against this rule can easily be legalised by payment of a small fine to the caste elders. Another reason why the *garh* system is of so little importance in the social life of the Gond, is that nowadays they pay more attention to another social system, that of kinship or *gotra*, as they call it. We shall treat of this in the next chapter.

It is interesting to note that we encounter the same *garh* system, under the identical name, among the Munda of Chotanagpur. Their territory was originally divided into seven *garh*. Later these *garh* were sub-divided into 21 *parha* or

<sup>6</sup> Cf. T. B. Naik (1949): Vol. 29, pp. 6-17.

<sup>7</sup> Private communication by Mrs. Leela Dube.

<sup>8</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, p. 466.



*pargana*.<sup>9</sup> Like the Gond, the Munda have, in addition to the *garh* system, a clan system which they call *kili*. Tradition states that it is of later origin.

### 3. THE GOTRA SYSTEM OF THE BHUMIA

The Bhumia have another form of relationship which they call *gotra* or *kur*. It is the relationship of persons descending from a common ancestor in the male line.<sup>10</sup>

W. Koppers<sup>11</sup> found near Duhania the following Bhumia *gotra*: Barhia, Darkur, Dhurwa, Jikram, Kawachi, Korcho, Korkam, Kusra, Marabi, Markam, Masaram, Pandowa, Patotia, Pendro, Pota, Takam (Takma), Sukha and Workara. Of these 18 clans, at least 14 are identical with Gond clans; namely, Dhurwa, Kawachi, Korcho, Kusra, Marabi, Markam, Masaram, Pandowa, Patotia, Pota, Takam and Workara.<sup>12</sup> The question may be raised therefore who borrowed from whom; did the Bhumia borrow their clan names from the Gond, or the Gond from the Bhumia? Against the latter assumption speaks the fact that certain of the above-mentioned Gond *gotra* are found in areas where no Bhumia are living from whom they could have borrowed these names. Thus the Marabi, Dhurwa and Markam clans are also found among the Bison-horn Maria Gond of Bastar State though no Bhumia or Baiga are living there.<sup>13</sup> There is no evidence that these clans emigrated from the Baiga tracts into Bastar State.

There is scarcely any sign of a totemistic character of the Bhumia *gotra* system, while this character is more pronounced in the Gond *gotra* system—another proof that the Bhumia adopted this system from the Gond, though incompletely—without its totemistic elements. Though the names of several Bhumia *gotra* are those of plants or animals, I could not find

<sup>9</sup> S. C. Roy (1912): pp. xv and 65.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted here that the *gotra* system of the Bhumia is not identical with that of the Hindu castes. They have merely the name in common. Cf. K. M. Kapadia (1947): pp. 55 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. unpublished manuscript.

<sup>12</sup> Sukha, I found to be the name of a *kher*, not of a *gotra*.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. W. V. Grigson (1949): p. 235.

any evidence of a veneration of those animals or plants. The Bhumia do not hold the belief that they are their ancestors, nor are they forbidden to eat or to destroy them. W. Koppers, however, was told by his Bhumia informants that some of the above-mentioned clans observed certain food taboos. Thus the members of the Dhurwa clan abstained from eating the fruits of the *pipal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*) and of the *pakri* tree (*Ficus infectoria*). Koppers was also told that members of the Dhurwa clan had to avoid bison meat. But these taboos too have probably been adopted from the Gond.

Another reason for the assumption that the *gotra* system of the Bhumia is a relatively recent innovation is that there is no evidence of the sentiment of solidarity between members of the same *gotra*. They take little interest in each other's welfare and if there is no other common bond among them they do not feel any obligation to mutual assistance based on the fact of merely belonging to the same *gotra*.

Among the Bhumia, as among the Gond, the *gotra* system is exogamous; but a breach of these marriage restrictions is easily forgiven. Often not even a fine is imposed on the offenders; at the most they pay a slight fine to make such a marriage legal. The Bhumia say that the fine is imposed to get remittance of the sin incurred by the partners to such a marriage, and by their caste fellows who allowed the wedding to take place.

How frequent such unions within the same *gotra* are may be shown from the example of a Bhumia, my informant Panga: he is of the same *gotra* as his wife (Dhurwa). Only his *kher* is different: he is a Sukha, while his wife is a Sarhia. Panga's son Gokhal, too, is married to a girl of the same *gotra*, Dhurwa; again, her *kher* is different: she is a Jhimur, while her husband is, of course, like his father, a Sukha. Panga's brother's wife likewise is of the Dhurwa *gotra*, her *kher* being the same as that of Panga's wife, Sarhia. His brother's daughter first married a Bhumia of the Dhurwa *gotra* and Sarhia *kher*. Later, the girl eloped with a Gond, to whom she is still attached.

These few instances show sufficiently that *gotra* exogamy is of no real consequence in the social life of the Bhumia.



The exogamy laws are broken frequently and with impunity.

The two systems, *gotra* and *kher*, are arranged among the Bhumia at present in such a manner that a certain *gotra* includes a limited number of *kher*: thus the Dhurwa *gotra* comprises the *kher* of Sukha, Sarhia, Jhimur and Gopalpuria. Among the Bhumia, the objection to marriage within the same *kher* is more pronounced than to marriage within the same *gotra*; though even a marriage within the same *kher* can be legalised by the mere payment of a fine. There is no strong horror of incestuous marriages among the Bhumia as among other aboriginal tribes of Central India.

#### 4. THE GOTRA OR KUR SYSTEM OF THE GOND

A Gond *gotra* or *kur* comprises a group of persons who believe that they are descendants in the male line of a common ancestor. While a man never changes his *gotra*, a woman acquires a new *gotra* through marriage, i.e. that of her husband. Their children belong to the *gotra* of the father. The Gond practise *gotra* exogamy; any one who marries a member of the same *gotra* is made an outcaste and can only be readmitted into the caste community after separation.

In eastern Mandla, at two places (Bijora and Junwani) I listed the following Gond *gotra*: Ayam, Bhagotia, Cham, Dhumketi, Dhurwa, Karpeti, Kolhia, Koram, Korcho, Kumhra, Kumja, Kusam, Kusro, Landam, Malgam or Malgoan, Markam, Masram, Maurawi, Neti, Orali, Ormu, Orweti, Otia, Palia, Pandaua, Pandro, Parmi, Parteti, Partha, Potta, Purkam, Pusam, Sarotia, Sarrati, Seyma, Sikram, Singram, Sujam, Sukram, Syam, Tamaria, Tekam or Takma, Thakur, Tilgam or Tilangam, Udde, Uika, Workara.

In a pamphlet written in Hindi by the Gond Bhawasin Rajnegi the following Gond *gotra* were listed as prevalent in Mandla District: Ahka, Ara, Arma, Armachi, Atram, Batti, Bhagadia, Bibinahka, Biskapa, Chicham, Dhurwa, Dipnahka (or Dibnahka), Duryam, Ganjam, Gheram, Gonraga (or Gonranga), Inwati, Irpachi, Kandata, Kangali, Karpeti, Khuram, Kokotia, Kolhiya (or Kolhya), Korcham, Koropa, Korram, Korweti, Kowachi, Kujam (or Kunjam), Kumra,

Kusram, Malangam, Mandhari, Markam, Marskola, Masram, Maurawi, Murato, Naitam, Namurtal, Neti, Pandaha (or Pandaua), Pandra (or Pandro), Parkam, Parteti, Purkam, Purram, Pusam, Salangam, Sallam, Soyyam, Taram, Tekam, Tilgam (or Tilangam), Tumram, Uika, Ulari, Walka, Warewi, and Warkara.

A comparison of these two registers shows that 25 of the 47 clans found in eastern Mandla are prevalent around Mandla town.

From another list, written in Hindi, by Kashiram Bhoi, the following clan names could be gleaned: Ahka, Arma, Armachi, Atram, Barewi, Bhalabi, Bibinahka, Biskapa, Chicham, Dhurwa Neti, Dibnahka Taram, Duryam, Ganjam, Gheram, Gonranga, Kandata, Kangali, Karpeti, Khursam, Kokotiya, Korcham, Koropa, Kolhya, Korram, Korweti, Kowachi, Kumra, Kunjam, Kusram, Malangam, Naitam, Namurtal, Pandaha Bhagadiya, Pandra, Parkam, Parteti, Purkam, Purram, Pusam, Sallam, Sarota, Sarrati, Sindram, Sirsam, Sorryam, Soyyam, Taram Tekam, Tilangam, Tumram, Ulari, Walka, Watti.

This list gives twenty-one clan names which are also found in eastern Mandla, while it gives eight names which are not found in Bhawasinh Rajnegi's list. Bhawasinh Rajnegi's list, however, gives twelve names which are not included in Kashiram Bhoi's list.

A list from Betul District,<sup>14</sup> further west of Mandla District, contains the following *gotra* names: Ahake, Bhalawi, Chichyam, Dhurwa, Duriam, Gajam, Irpachi, Junati, Kangali, Kaure, Kokkoder, Kumrol, Kursenga, Marskola, Masram, Moropa, Naitam, Naure, Padam, Parte, Pendam, Salam, Sariam, Sarram, Sindram, Sirsam, Soi-welal, Tekam, Tirgam, Tiringam, Tumram, Uika (or Oika, with the following sub-clans: Lonchatial, Tumri-sar, Urrum-sar and Wade Udur), Wariwa and Watti.

A comparison of this register with that of eastern Mandla shows that six clans for certain, probably two more, are found in both districts. But in the west of Mandla District more

<sup>14</sup> C. G. Chevenix-Trench (1921): *passim*.



clans bear names which are also found in Betul District: their number is seventeen.

Since most Gond clan names, even in eastern Mandla, are in the Gondi language and quite a few of them common to Gond groups in widely separate districts, it may be safely assumed that the clan system of the Gond is at least as old as their use of a Dravidian language. Their clan system, perhaps also their peculiar form of totemism of which we shall have to say more later, may ante-date the adoption of the Dravidian dialect, though this is not likely as the Gond also have the territorial group system which seems to be older. In this connection it is worth mentioning that while some Gond clans bear the names of animals, others call themselves after plants and trees, a peculiarity which they share not only with the Kunbi and Maratha of the Deccan,<sup>15</sup> but also with many South Indian tribes and castes.<sup>16</sup> I have been able to find out the meaning of only a few clan names. Ahka may be derived from *ahi*, the dragon. There is a Ahban Rajput clan.<sup>17</sup> Bhagotia (or Bhagadia) may be derived from *bhagat* (religious mendicant, sorcerer). There is also a Telugu fisherman caste by the same name.<sup>18</sup> Dhurwa means 'dust' this being the name of a group of Gond clans socially inferior to the Raj-Gond. *Kolhia* is the word for 'jackal'. But there is no evidence that members of this clan venerate the jackal. *Kumhra* is the red gourd (*Cucurbita maxima*), while *Markam* means 'mango', though the members of this clan do not venerate the mango, but the tortoise. *Neti* is the name for 'dog', while the clan name *Palia* may be derived from *palo* (piece of cloth, a flag). There is also a Gond deity by name of Palo. *Pandava* of course means the five Pandava brothers who play an important part in Gond mythology. *Pandro* might be derived from *panda*, a priest of Marai-mata or a magician. *Potta* signifies an anthill, and *Pusam* is perhaps derived from *pusa* (beads). *Sarotia* is 'the nut-cutter', *Sarrati* 'the whip', while *Singram* is the name of a famous Gond king. *Syam* or

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R. E. Enthoven (1920-22): Vol. I, p. 182.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. H. Niggemeyer (1933): pp. 432-3.

<sup>17</sup> W. Crooke (1926): Vol. 2, p. 149.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. E. Thurston (1909): Vol. 5, p. 422.

*Suyam* may be derived from *sui*, 'the porcupine', while *Tamaria* is also the name of a Rajput clan. *Tekam* is the teak tree, and the members of this clan at least in Betul District do not cut the tree. *Thakur* is a common name for a Rajput or big landlord. *Tilgam* or *Tilangam* obviously means 'Telugu'. *Udde* or *Odde* derives its name from the otter, and members of this clan feel some sort of veneration for this animal. *Workara* means 'wild cat'.

*Armachi* is another name for the *dhaura* tree (*Anogeissus latifolia*), *Ganjam* is a town and district in Orissa, *Gheram* may come from *gheru matti*, red ochre.<sup>19</sup> *Sallam* may be derived from *sal* (*Shorea robusta*), while *Ulari* is also the name of a caste in South India.<sup>20</sup> *Warewi* is probably Vairavi, i.e. Bairagi, a religious mendicant.

In the register of Chevenix-Trench we come across the clan name *Bhalawi* which is obviously derived from *bhilawan* (*Semecarpus anacardium*), the marking-nut, while *Padam* probably is *padi*, the pig. The Uika sub-clans Urrum-sar and Tumri-sar derive their names from *urru*m, the large monitor (iguana) and *tumri* (or *tendu*, *Diospyros melanoxylon*).

All the Gond clans of eastern Mandla are organized in groups of eighteen clans. Members of every group of eighteen clans call each other *saga bhai*, 'blood brothers'. Each group of eighteen brother clans has its own totem and the same taboo rules, and if a certain clan has split into two or more sub-sections, the members of the sections observe in addition to the general taboos those of their own section. Inter-marriage between the clans of a group (phratry) is forbidden; if it takes place the culprits are made outcastes, but their marriage can be legalised if they pay a fine and give a caste dinner to the village council.

It is difficult to ascertain the names of the eighteen clans which belong to one group. It is not even possible to find out whether there are really exactly eighteen clans that form a group or whether the number 'eighteen' stands merely for

<sup>19</sup> The correct spelling of the word is *geru*, but in eastern Mandla *gheru* is also quite common.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Thurston: op. cit. Vol. 7, p. 242.



an approximate number. The reason why it is so difficult to ascertain the eighteen clans of a group is this: the Gond of eastern Mandla do not like to marry their daughters into distant villages. And in the narrow circle of villages where they have their acquaintances, the number of clans is limited, never eighteen. Nobody, consequently, appears to know all the eighteen clans which form a group.

My information about this group organization is therefore incomplete. What I have been able to find out I give in the following list:

VILLAGE	CLAN	MAY MARRY WITH	MAY NOT MARRY WITH
Bijora	Kusro	?	Malgam, Tilgam, Landam, Kusam, Markam, Tekam, Pusam
Bijora	Masram	Udde, Korcho, Parteti, Markam	Kolhia, Pandro, Maurawi, Pusam, Syam, Tilgam
Bijora	Maurawi	?	Seyma, Pandro, Ormu, Sarotia, Pandaua, Singram, Pusam, Korcho
Bijora	Udde	?	Bhagotia, Uika, Dhurwa, Potta, Sujam, Tekam, Masram, Kusro, Orkara, Pandro, Ormu, Sarotia, Singram
Junwani	Maurawi	Pusam, Korcho, Tekam, Parteti, Markam, Tilgam, Landam, Kusro, Potta, Uika, Dhurwa, Oreti, Bhagotia, Malgam, Neti, Orali, Kumhra	Kolhia, Pandro, Syam, Udde, Sarotia, Ayam
Junwani	Kolhia	like Maurawi	like Maurawi
Junwani	Markam	Maurawi, Kolhia, Pandro, Syam, Korcho, Parteti, Orweti, Potta, Uika, Dhurwa	Sujam, Pusam, Tekam, Tilgam, Landam, Kusro, Malgam, Orali
Haloni	Maurawi	Dhurwa, Partha, Markam, Kusro, Pusam, Dhumketi, Karpeti, Parteti, Otia	Pandro, Masram, Palia, Malgoan

VILLAGE	CLAN	MAY MARRY WITH	MAY NOT MARRY WITH
Naijar	Maurawi	Dhurwa, Markam, Parteti, Kusro, Malgoan, Tekam	Masram, Kolhia
Parapan	Parmi	Kolhia, Markam, Pusam, Malgoan, Maurawi	Dhurwa, Dhumketi,
Chitakhodri Thakur		Maurawi, Pusam	Dhurwa, Sarrati
Jaldartola	Bhagotia	Parteti, Malgoan, Masram, Markam	Dhurwa, Dhumketi, Pusam, Partha, Maurawi
Chandra-Tikaria	Takma	Parteti, Cham, Potta, Dhurwa, Maurawi	Markam
Jaldartola	Tekam	Dhurwa, Dhumketi, Seyma, Maurawi	Markam, Masram, Potta
Pali	Tilagam	Maurawi, Pandro, Dhurwa, Parteti, Malgoan	Markam, Masram, Tekam
Umaria	Markam	Otia, Oremu, Partotia, Masram, Maurawi, Seyma, Dhurwa, Karpeti, Pandro	Malgoan, Dhumketi, Pusam, Kumja, Markam, Tekam
Bijora	Parteti	Udde, Markam, Tilangam, Kusro, Maurawi, Dhurwa, Tamararia, Uika, Masram	?

This survey, though incomplete, shows at least one result: that the groups of 'eighteen clans' are not definite in the sense that they exclude each other. It seems rather that, according to the above given table, at least the clans Maurawi, Masram, Udde, and Kolhia belong to one group, while the clans Markam, Kusro, Tilgam, Tekam, Pusam belong to another. It must be noted, however, that the Markam name at least four clans as brother clans which are also brother clans of the Maurawi. We also notice that the Udde clan registers nine clans as *saga bhai* clans which are not registered as such by the Maurawi, Kolhia and Masram. This may be due to incomplete information. On the other hand, if we sum up



all the various clans which are brother clans either to the Maurawi, or to the Kolhia, Masram and Udde, we get 28 clans in this one group, which is ten in excess of 'eighteen'. Since the Gond are quite emphatic about the number of clans in a group being always 'eighteen', we can scarcely assume that a single group would include 28 clans. As far as the available evidence goes, it seems to suggest rather that the groups of 'eighteen' do not consist everywhere of the same clans. At one place a certain clan may be dropped and another included in its place. The division of the clans into groups of 'eighteen' is obviously not motivated by the principle of a common descent, but by the principle of marriage. Within a certain number of villages all the Gond clans are grouped in two moieties which are exogamous, i.e. the members of one group choose their marriage partners from the other. This would suggest the existence of a dual organization, at least in former times when the clans were not so much mixed as they are today.

We notice that the Udde, though obviously a brother clan of the Maurawi, may not intermarry with eight clans with which the Maurawi intermarry. The Markam, on the other hand, though they belong to a different phratry, may intermarry with ten clans with which the Maurawi also intermarry. The Tekam, again, intermarry with at least four clans with which the Maurawi intermarry, but also with the Seyma, a brother clan of the Maurawi. The Parteti, too, intermarry with seven clans with which the Maurawi exchange wives, but also with the Maurawi themselves and the Masram, a brother clan of the Maurawi. This apparent inconsistency can only be explained by the assumption of a practical dual organization within a certain area which, however, got confused by the mixing up of the clans. For we must remember that in former times a village area was occupied by one clan only, and clan exogamy meant also territorial exogamy, and *vice versa*. It may also be mentioned that at one place the Maurawi are allowed to intermarry with, for instance, members of the Pusam or Korcho clans, while at other places their intermarriage with the same clans is prohibited. This may be an error of the informants. But such instances are also

mentioned in the case of other clans: at one place the Masram intermarry with the Udde, at another place they are not allowed to do so.

That a clan may split up into several sub-sections is quite common among other castes and tribes too. It is very probable that in this procedure the Gond follow the example of the Rajput who formed first 36 clans, which later on developed into veritable races. While some of these clans died out, others increased so much in numbers that they split into sub-sections which in the course of time started to intermarry. In the end a clan became endogamous, i.e., members of a clan married only with clan fellows, though of a different section.<sup>21</sup> The Gond have not yet advanced so far: members of a *gotra* are still punished if they intermarry; but the marriage can finally be legalised if they belong to two different sections of the same *gotra*.

There is no evidence that the Gond clans outside of eastern Mandla are likewise organized in groups of just eighteen clans. In western Mandla and in other districts the Gond have another principle of grouping; they consider those clans as brother clans which worship the same number of clan gods. The number 'eighteen', in general, seems to signify an indefinite multitude. Of a woman who has been turned out by her caste fellows the non-tribals say: '*Athara jat ke gayi*, she has gone to eighteen castes.' Among the Banjara, a caste of carriers and drivers of pack-animals, a man who is too poor to give a dinner to his caste community, kills a goat, cuts it into eighteen pieces and distributes them to his community. This token gift is accepted in place of a caste dinner.<sup>22</sup>

If the Gond of eastern Mandla say that each of their 'brother clan' groups comprises eighteen clans, it would only mean that such a group comprises an indefinite number of clans. The number of clans in such a group may be much higher than eighteen, as for instance in Bastar where, according to Russell, 'there are ninety septs in A Class and sixty-nine in B Class, though the list may be incomplete...'<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, pp. 412, 418.

<sup>22</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, p. 175.

<sup>23</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, p. 65.



A parallel to this system of grouping eighteen clans is perhaps found in the Agarwal caste of Bihar, but according to old tradition formerly resident in Madras. The whole caste is divided into eighteen clans (i.e. seventeen and one). The origin of the clans is derived from eighteen sacrifices which Raja Agar Nath performed in honour of Lakshmi. When the eighteenth sacrifice was half over, the Raja, appalled by the slaughter of so many animals, broke off the ceremony. The eighteenth clan is therefore considered a half complete clan.<sup>24</sup> The Badaga of South India too recognize eighteen different sub-groups in their caste.<sup>25</sup> So did the Nair of Malabar in former times.<sup>26</sup>

With the exception of the Kusro clan, which worships the tiger, no Gond clan of eastern Mandla venerates any special clan gods. The system of clan god worship, which is so prevalent in other districts of Gondwana and which the Gond there call *dewal*, is only dimly remembered by the Gond of eastern Mandla. When they say of a clan fellow: 'We are of the same *dewal*', it has another meaning; it means that they are of the same clan, not, that they worship the same number of clan gods.

It may be noted here that in this regard the Gond of eastern Mandla are in conformity with the Hill Maria and Bison-horn Maria, a Gond sub-group in Bastar, who are also ignorant of the *dewal* clan god worship as practised by the Gond elsewhere.<sup>27</sup>

The emphasis in the *dewal* system of clan god worship is not on the names and nature of the clan gods, but on their number. The Gond, accordingly, do not care by what names they should address their clan gods, as long as they know how many there are to be worshipped. This peculiarity of grouping in an exogamous phratry all clans which worship the same number of clan gods seems to be unique in Central India; it is not found in any other tribe or caste in this area.

<sup>24</sup> H. H. Risley (1891): p. 5; Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, p. 137.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. E. Thurston: op. cit. Vol. I, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> P. K. Gopalakrishnan (1952): p. 190.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. W. V. Grigson (1948): pp. 194 ff.

In the Gond villages around Mandla, for instance, the following gods are worshipped by the clans: *Bara deo*, *Dulha deo*, *Ratwali*, *Dehriwala*, *Poitar-Poi*, *Dewala* and *Deshiwala*. The latter is a *devi*, i.e., a goddess. Gond clans which worship seven clan gods worship all these seven gods. Those clans which worship only six clan gods drop the last one, *Deshiwala*, while Gond clans which worship only five gods, drop *Deshiwala* and *Dewala*, and so on.

According to another informant, the names of the Gond clan gods are the following: *Bara deo*, *Kala deo*, *Palo deo*, *Bhiri deo*, *Pardhan*, *Burhal deo* and *Kuwar deo*. The clans worshipping only three gods worship the first three; those clans which worship four, add the fourth, and so on.

Russell and Hiralal have still another list of clan gods: *Pharsi Pen*, *Matiya*, *Ghangra*, *Chawar*, *Palo* and *Sale*. All together are called *Bura deo*, which name is also given to the great god of the Gond.<sup>28</sup>

According to a Gond informant at Nainpur in Mandla District the following Gond clans worship seven gods: *Maurawi*, *Saryam*, *Sohiyam*, *Kolhiya*, *Kokaniya*, *Pandro* and *Kusro*. Six gods are worshipped by the *Uika*, *Wahi*, *Walari*, *Kunhara*, *Bhagadiya*, *Pusam* and *Neti*. Five gods are worshipped by the *Korcho*, *Nareti*, *Parteti*, *Parkara*, *Dhurwa*, *Kujam* and *Gajam*. Four gods are worshipped by the *Tekam*, *Markam*, *Parasram*, *Salgam*, *Tilgam*, *Naitam* and *Namuntal*. Three gods are worshipped by the *Kusru*, *Barkara*, *Kulha*, *Sarotia*, *Gorga*, *Sakli* and *Jawarsinh*.<sup>29</sup> Clans who worship the same number of clan gods are not allowed to intermarry.

<sup>28</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, p. 99. It is possible that the Gond imitated the Hindu *pravara* institution; among the Hindus, intermarriage is prohibited in families which mention in their sacrificial prayers the same mythical Rishi ancestors; their number is either three or five. The *pravara* institution groups together a certain number of Hindu *gotra*, just as among the Gond of Mandla (in the more Hinduised districts) certain *gotra* belong to one or the other *dewal*.

<sup>29</sup> This list does not seem to be quite reliable as several *gotra* are listed twice under different categories: the *Kulha* (or *Kolhiya*) and *Kusru* under three and seven, the *Parkara* (or *Barkara*) under three and five.



Another Gond informant gave the following list: Seven gods are worshipped by the Maurawi, Kohariya, Dhurwa, Saryam and Pandro. Six gods are worshipped by the Wattī, Uika and Nareti. Five gods are worshipped by the Korcho and Sirsam, four gods by the Tekam, and three gods only by the Kusru and Kolhiya.

A comparison of these lists with the clan grouping prevalent in eastern Mandla shows that the two systems of exogamy do not tally. In eastern Mandla, a Maurawi would be prohibited from marrying a Sarotia, Korcho or Pusam; but in the villages around Mandla there is no such prohibition. In eastern Mandla, a Kusro could not marry a Pusam, Tekam, Markam or Tilgam; but near Mandla town such unions are perfectly legal, as the aforementioned clans worship different numbers of clan gods.

It now remains to be seen if the clans are grouped according to the *garh* to which they belong. According to Bhawasin̄h Rajnēgi, the following clans belong to the *garh* Chanda-garh: Ara, Arma, Armachi, Atram, Ahka, Irpachi, Kangali, Kujam, Ganjam, Gonraga, Khursam, Cheram, Chicham, Dip-nahka, Taram, Tilangam, Tumram, Purram, Bibinahka, Biskapa, Malangam, Masram, Mandhari. To the *garh* Lanjigarh belong the following clans: Tekam, Duryam, Naitam, Namurtal, Parkam, Pandro, Purkam and Pusam. To Chinidhirigarh: Inwati. To Kaweligarh: Uika. To Kareligarh: Karpeti. To Sanjarugarh: Kusram. To Bitligarh: Radhapeti Bhalawi. To Kharrakhirigarh: Marskola. To Dhamadagarh: Markam. To *Garha* Mandla Ramnagar (seven miles from Mandla, also called Garhakota): Murawi. To Kuraigarh: Kumhra. To Dewgarh: Kandata. To Bhainsagarh: Dhurwa. To *Garh* Saledongri: Neti. To Sindaradehi Lohakodgarh: Parteti. To Amudagarh: Bhalawi. To Jamudagarh: Surya Bhalawi. To Nagarkhana: Koda Bhalawi. To Khanoragarh: Sallam. To Pratapgarh: Soyyam. To Banatagarh: Battli. To Harrai-Batkagarh: Korweti. To Gangurwagarh: Koropa. To Kusumgarh: Udde (?). To Deohargarh (a hill, two miles from Bijora): Maurawi. To Rahilagarh: Masram.

This list shows clearly that at present there is no inner connection between the *garh* system and the formation of eighteen

clans in a group. Members of one clan may belong to different *garh*, and *garh* fellows often belong to different clans. Thus the *garh* Chandagarh includes no less than 23 *gotra*, while on the other hand the members of the Bhalawi and Maurawi clans belong to three or four different *garh*.

Another possibility is that the Gond in eastern Mandla had the same land division which still is remembered in Bastar: there a certain number of villages with their land have formed in the past a *garh*.<sup>30</sup> Wills states that it was the custom of the Rajput rulers to divide their kingdoms into conventional numbers of *garh* or *chaurasi*, these again being sub-divided into *taluk* or *barhon* each of which contained twelve villages.<sup>31</sup> If in eastern Mandla 18 villages—each inhabited by one clan only—were united into a *taluk* this would explain why these 18 clans felt that they belonged together and considered themselves as brother clans. If this feeling of solidarity later developed into exogamy it would explain the existence of exogamous groups of eighteen clans in eastern Mandla. We find a parallel development in the *garh* exogamy of the same Gond.

That the Gond have two different systems of social organization is due to two different social conceptions: one based on territorial, the other on genealogical solidarity. These two basic concepts were originally blended into one: the clan formed not only a social but also a territorial unit; or in other words, the members of a clan usually lived in villages of their own. Each village was the centre of a more or less definite area of jungle land, the exclusive domain of a larger family group. Trespassers were not tolerated. Thus the members of one clan were at the same time members of the same territorial unit. Consequently, clan exogamy also meant territorial exogamy, i.e. a girl married into another village and a boy had to take his bride from another village. This social regulation was strengthened by certain customs. On certain festivals, for instance on or shortly after Dasehra, all the marriageable boys and girls of a village formed two separate groups and proceeded to neighbouring villages, the boys to one

<sup>30</sup> W. V. Grigson (1949): pp. 32 ff.

<sup>31</sup> C. U. Wills (1919): pp. 197-262.



and the girls to another village. There they danced and sang with the girls or the boys of that village. The following year the visit was returned. It was natural that liaisons were formed and marriage matches arranged on such occasions.

Originally the *garh* system, at least in its practical issues, meant the same as the *gotra* system. It depended on the basic social conception of the tribe, whether its members attached more importance to territorial or to genealogical solidarity. In the course of time, however, the increase of population or the loss of land due to the encroachment of outsiders (non-tribal agriculturists) resulted in a disturbance of the local compactness of the clan. At present, the members of a clan are dispersed over a wide area and we find in every village members of different clans, and *garh*. When this disintegration took place, the Gond apparently had already developed a strong clan solidarity. The *gotra* system consequently took first place in social importance.

There is some evidence of a totemistic origin of the Gond *gotra*. A group of eighteen clans always has the same totem. This would suggest that the 'eighteen clans' in a group are simply sections of a phratry split up at one time into eighteen clans. The number 'eighteen' may stand for an indefinite number; it would not prevent some clans from splitting further into more groups. This obviously has happened with the Dhurwa clan; it has been divided into several sub-sections which all observe the taboo restrictions of the mother-clan and, in addition to these, observe also certain taboos and totems of their own.

The totemism which the Gond practise is of a much diluted form.<sup>32</sup> It is found in this form among many castes of Central India which cannot be said to be strongly influenced by the Gond.<sup>33</sup> This diluted form of totemism could well have been

<sup>32</sup> I cannot agree with H. Niggemeyer who thinks that the Gond (with Bhil, Baiga, Korku, Oraon, Maria, Kui, etc.) are the true representatives of totemism in India. Cf. H. Niggemeyer (1933): Vol. 28, pp. 590-2.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. S. Fuchs (1950): pp. 237-53. It is also worth mentioning that the Panka, a semi-aboriginal weaving caste in Gondwana, bear clan names which suggest a more pronounced totemism: Baghel (tiger), Barwar (buffalo), Bhainsa (buffalo), Sanwani (jungle dog), Mongri

introduced into the country by the Rajput, or could be of even older origin. There is no evidence that the animal which is venerated by the Gond as their totem is regarded at any place as the ancestor of the tribe or of the clan. Nor is clan exogamy very strictly enforced; when a clan has been divided into two or more sub-sections the members of two different sub-sections may marry each other, after payment of a fine, though they venerate the same totem.

A few instances may suffice for illustration: The Gond members of the Markam clan, for instance, though they were called after the mango, seem to stand in special relationship to the tortoise.<sup>31</sup> When they find a dead tortoise, they venerate it by offering *hum* (i.e. pouring clarified butter or incense into a fire). They address the tortoise as 'maharaj' which in Central India is a title preserved for Brahmins. They avoid pronouncing the name 'tortoise'. They do not kill a tortoise nor eat its meat. As mentioned before, the other brother clans of the Markam observe the same taboos and rites of worship. In this particular case, the tortoise is venerated in the same manner by the Kusro, Tekam (who have their name from the teak tree), Tilgam, Pusam, etc. The Markam and their brother clans are also forbidden to eat crocodile meat.

There is a legend about how the tortoise became the totem of the Markam clan. It was related to me by a Gond at Bijora: One day all Gond crossed a broad and swift river by means of a long rope which they had spanned over the river before the monsoon had set in. After crossing the river without mishap, they sat down at the river side and prepared a meal. All clans except that of Markam had three or four stone slabs ready to form a hearth for their pots and pans. As the Markam could not find any suitable stones for the hearth, they used cane-sugar (*gur*) instead. But the lumps

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(fish). But they also have clans like Dhanya (coriander). These clan names of the Panka I found at Junwani; of two other names, Bithania and Tauriya, I could not get the meaning. It is perhaps significant that all these clan names are of Aryan origin.

<sup>31</sup> There is one Rajput clan which is named after the tortoise: Kachh-waha. It is possible that the Markam clan adopted its totem from this famous clan.



of sugar melted in the fire and the Markam consequently had some difficulty in getting their meal ready. They had not yet finished dinner when the other clans began to cross the river again on their way back to the village. When they had crossed, they cut the rope which connected both sides. The Markam, when they saw that the rope had been cut were feeling very sorry for themselves and cried in a loud voice: 'We shall never see our children again.' But a tortoise in the river heard them. Touched by pity, it swam to the land and invited the Markam to climb on its back. Then it carried them all to the other side of the river. Since that time no Markam touches, kills or eats a tortoise.<sup>35</sup>

At Junwani I heard the following interesting variation of this legend: A man of the Markam *gotra* had died. His relatives and clan fellows, as well as others, assembled in his village to celebrate the funeral feast (*kotmais*). After the funeral, they all returned home. But before they could reach their village, they had to cross a huge river.<sup>36</sup> Before they attempted the crossing, they sat down and took a meal. Then they called the ferryman (*ghatwala*). They shouted 'Ghatwala! Ghatwala!' Instead of the ferryman, however, a giant tortoise appeared from the depth and said: 'I am the ferryman. The real ferryman has gone somewhere.' The men sat down on the back of the tortoise to cross the river. When they were in the middle of the river, the tortoise said: 'Now at last after so many years I have some meat to eat.' It dived down into the water to drown the men. They started shouting and crying and splashing around. Just at that moment a vulture came flying from a hill, caught them one by one by their hair-lock (*jhundi*) and carried them across the river. The vulture said: 'The tortoise is your enemy. Do not eat its meat; nor never touch it.'<sup>36a</sup>

<sup>35</sup> W. V. Grigson relates a similar tale of the Markam clansmen among the Bison-horn Maria Gond of Bastar State (1938): p. 241.

<sup>36</sup> My informants used the word *samudr* which really means 'ocean'. But from the context it is clear that they crossed a river, or fjord.

<sup>36a</sup> This version tallies better with the narration which Russell and Hiralal give of the same event. [Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3. 61 ff.]

Kusro clansmen stand in a similar relation to the tiger (*Bagheshwar*). The tiger is their god. It is always and in all circumstances taboo. For explanation of this relationship the Gond narrate the following tale: Once somewhere in the country of the Gond there lived a man-eating tiger. Even the most powerful spells and incantations of the sorcerers were of no avail against him. At last a sorcerer who belonged to the clan Kusro was called. He entered the jungle by night, cornered the tiger and successfully exorcised him by driving a nail into a tree and making an offering. Since that time the tiger did not kill any one and the members of the Kusro clan began to venerate *Bagheshwar*, the lord of the jungle.

W. Koppers heard at Duhanja that Kusro clansmen have a spot on the veranda of their houses where they worship the tiger. At Dullopur this was denied. But I was told that at the time of the wedding of a girl belonging to the clan, her family offers a pig or black goat to *Bagheshwar*. First they leave the victim free, then chase it around till it is caught. They give it some grain to eat. An old man suddenly gets possessed of the god, throws himself on the goat and kills it by biting through its throat. If this is not possible, he or the other men throw the animal on the ground and press it down till it dies. The man possessed by the tiger-god behaves like a tiger, growls and snarls and drinks the blood of the victim. Or he takes the animal by its hind legs and smashes its head against the ground. Then the head is cut off with an axe. The meat is boiled and eaten by the members of the clan only. The bones are thrown away.

No sacrifice is performed when a boy of the clan marries. But if at the wedding of a girl no such sacrifice were performed, the Gond believe that a tiger would kill the girl's bridegroom. It is he who has to provide the victim.

A similar sacrifice is performed at Diwari. If on that occasion a sorcerer (*panda*) is present, he often gets possessed by the god and falls into a trance. In this condition he may grab a fowl which is thrown at him, tear it with his bare hands and devour it with feathers and all.

Members of the clan, though they may not kill a tiger or eat its meat, are allowed to use tiger's fat as a medicine.



The members of the Potta clan have to avoid a house in which a person has died, till after the funeral. They may not attend a funeral except from a distance. These regulations do not apply when a member of their clan or family has died.

According to other information at Bijora, the members of the Potta and Uika clans may not carry the corpse of their deceased *nat* relatives to the burning place, but they are allowed to enter the deceased's house; they may not partake of the funeral dinner which is given on the first day of the funeral feast. Only on the second day are they allowed to eat. Customs differ from village to village. At Junwani I heard that the Potta and Uika clansmen may not bury the corpses of their sisters and daughters, nor of the latter's husbands and in-laws. If a boy serving for a wife (*lamsena*) dies in the house of his future father-in-law, the latter is allowed to bury him. But if such a boy after marriage leaves his father-in-law and starts a separate household, his father-in-law is prohibited from burying him. Nor may he partake of the funeral dinner on the first day of the feast.

Members of the Maurawi and Dhurwa clans may not eat the fruits of the *pipar* tree (*Ficus religiosa*). The same applies to the Parteti, Masram, Uika and Sarotia clans. The Gond at Bijora stated that members of the Maurawi, Parteti, Markam and Dhurwa clans should also abstain from eating bison meat. Though they maintain that this restriction is an old custom and not a recent innovation, the Gond at Junwani knew nothing about it. They ate the fruits of *pipar*, and also bison meat. Only the man who planted a *pipar* tree was prohibited from eating its fruits, but for another reason.

At Bijora I was told that the Gond of the Tamarua subsection of the Dhurwa clan do not eat goats' meat. They are not even allowed to feed a goat, nor to offer it in sacrifice. As reason for this rule they relate the following legend: The ancestors of the *gotra* had stolen one or several goats from another village to sacrifice them to *Bara deo*. The next day when the sacrifice had just taken place, the owner of the goats arrived, accompanied by some caste fellows and a police constable, for he had previously made a report of the theft at the police station. When the thieves saw the men, they prayed

to *Bara deo*: 'We are caught. Now you must save us. If you do, we shall always sacrifice pigs to you. Make the heads of the goats, their legs and all the flesh into the heads, legs and the flesh of pigs.' And so it happened indeed. The Tamaria were saved.

It is believed that if a member of this *gotra* would eat goats' meat, his eyes would burst, and he would die; this would be *Bara deo's* punishment. Also the wives of Tamaria clansmen must abstain from goats' meat, even when they pay a visit to their parents who eat goats' meat. But a Tamaria's daughter, after her marriage, is allowed to eat goats' meat, because after marriage she no longer belongs to the clan of her father, but to that of her husband.

At Junwani, the Kumhra Parteti told the same story to explain why they should not eat goats' meat. A breach of this taboo would result in sickness or some other serious misfortune. If they even touched a goat, they would have to perform the purification ceremony.

The Ud(wa) or Udde<sup>37</sup> *gotra* derives its name from the otter (*ud*). Members of the clan may not eat the animal's meat, as they are believed to belong to the same caste. The Udde say that *Bara deo* himself gave them this law. They do not, however, venerate or worship the otter.

## 5. RELATIONSHIP TERMS IN EASTERN MANDLA

Father: *bap, baba, dada*

Father's father: *dada, daji, budha*

Father's mother: *aji*

Father's brother: (elder) *bara baba*  
(younger) *kaka*

Father's sister: (elder) *sas*  
(younger) *mausi*

Mother: *dai*

Mother's father: *budha*

<sup>37</sup> There is a Telugu caste of earth-workers in South India which bears the name of 'Udde'.



- Mother's mother: *budhi*  
Mother's brother: *mama*  
Mother's sister (elder): *bari dai, mami*  
(younger) *mausi*  
Father's brother's son: (older than ego) *bhai, dada*  
(younger than ego) *bhai*  
Father's brother's daughter: *bahin*  
Father's sister's son: *hena*  
Father's sister's daughter: *bai*  
Mother's brother's son: *hena*  
Mother's brother's daughter: *bai*  
Mother's sister's son: *bhai*  
Mother's sister's daughter: *bahin*  
Brother: (elder) *dada, bhai, dau*  
(younger) *dau, bhai*  
Brother's son: (elder brother's) *dau, batija*  
(younger brother's) *batija*  
Brother's daughter: (elder brother's) *batijin*  
(younger brother's) *batijin*  
Sister: (elder) *bahin, daua, baya*  
(younger) *noni*  
Elder sister's son: *dau, bahin beta*  
Younger sister's son: *bhacha, bhanaaj*  
Elder sister's daughter: *bai, bhanejin*  
Younger sister's daughter: *noni, bai, bhanejin*  
Son: *beta, dau*  
Son's son: *dau, beta nati*  
Son's daughter: *noni, beta natin*  
Daughter: *beti, noni*  
Daughter's son: *beti nati*  
Daughter's daughter: *noni bai*  
Husband: *gharwala, dau, dauka*  
Husband's father: *sasur*  
Husband's mother: *sas, phua*  
Husband's elder brother: *jeth*  
Husband's younger brother: *dewar, dau*  
Husband's elder sister: *jer sas*  
Husband's younger sister: *nanand, noni*  
Wife: *dauki, bai, noni*





With very few exceptions, all the terms of kinship and affinity in use in eastern Mandla are in the Hindi language.<sup>38</sup> They are used by the Bhumia as well as by the Gond, and the other castes and tribes of the district. Also remarkable is the frequent use of indefinite terms, like *budha* (the old one), *bai* (woman), *noni* (the little one), *bhai* (brother), etc., to connote more distant degrees of relationship. It appears that aboriginal society in eastern Mandla was until very recently not in much need of definite terms with regard to distant relations. This is in remarkable contrast to the very exact relationship terms of the Gond in other parts of their habitat.<sup>39</sup>

A man calls his wife *bai* (woman), while a woman calls her husband *dau*. *Dauka* for 'husband' and *dauki* for 'wife' are old-fashioned terms; people still remember them though they rarely ever use them now. *Dauka* really means *dauka baba* (child's father), and *dauki dauki dai* (child's mother).<sup>40</sup> When a man speaks of his wife, he calls her 'the mother of his child', while she speaks of her husband as 'the father of the child'. Other terms are *gharwala* (inmate of the house) or simply 'he'. Husband and wife never pronounce each other's personal names in the presence of others, nor may they address each other by terms of another relationship. But a man may call his wife by her nickname, and likewise a woman may use the nickname of her husband to call him. In the villages of eastern Mandla, every man and woman of the aboriginal tribes bears such a nickname. Sometimes, when a woman wants to call her husband within the hearing of others, she asks another person, often a child, to call him. Among the Bhumia a man may address his wife as *noni* (daughter's daughter). She replies: '*Awa ru*' (I have come).

*Bap* or *baba* is the term used for 'father', and also for the mother's elder sister's husband (who is often the father's elder brother). Moreover, any old man, even a stranger,

<sup>38</sup> Cf. I. Karve (1953): pp. 98-102.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. M. P. Buradkar (1940): pp. 147-80.

<sup>40</sup> The word *dau* is probably derived from the Sanskrit word *doha*, milking, and has the meaning of 'a suckling'.

may be addressed as *baba*; it is an expression of respect. The father's elder brother is usually addressed as *bara baba*, great father, because in a joint family his position is superior to the speaker's own father. Similarly the mother's elder sister and the father's elder brother's wife are both called *bari dai* (great mother).

Another term used to address a father is *dada*. But the speaker's elder brother, too, is often addressed as *dada*. In a joint-family, after the father's death, the eldest brother takes charge of the family and his younger brothers and sisters are supposed to respect him as their father. Even when the married brothers separate after their father's death, the unmarried brothers and sisters usually stay with their eldest brother. He supports them and arranges their marriage when they grow up. He also pays the expenses of their wedding. His wife calls her husband's younger brothers *dau* (son) and his younger sisters *noni*, i.e., daughter (lit., the little one). The boys and girls, however, do not address their elder brother's wife as 'mother', but as *bhauji* or *bahu*, sometimes also as *noni*.

*Dai* is the usual term for 'mother'; her elder sister as well as the father's elder brother's wife are addressed as *bari dai* (great mother). The latter is often also called *bai* by which title any respectable woman may be addressed. The mother's younger sister is called *mausi*. If a man has taken his deceased elder brother's wife, his own children call their step-mother *mausi* or *mothari* (mother).

The father's father is addressed as *dadi* or *daji*; any old man who could be the speaker's grandfather is addressed as *daji*. This address expresses some familiarity between persons of very disparate age. A term which expresses less respect is *budha* (the old one), which is the proper term for a mother's father, and a husband's father's father. But any old man may be addressed as *budha*.

The father's mother is called *aji*, the mother's mother *nani* or *budhi*. The latter expression is used to address any old woman, though it is not exactly a very respectable address. A woman also calls her husband's mother's mother *budhi*.

*Beta* is the term used for son, but it also signifies a wife's



sister's son and a husband's brother's son, if they live in the same family as often happens. A more general term is *dau*, which is used not only for a son but also for a son's son, a younger brother, and elder brother's son, and elder sister's son, a younger sister's son, the husband's younger brother, the husband's brother's son, the wife's sister's son.

*Beti* is the term by which not only a daughter is addressed, but also the wife's sister's daughter and the husband's brother's daughter. The term *beta* and *beti* are commonly used by elderly people when they address children. This use is common among the Hindus too.

Grandparents address their son's son as *beta nati*, a daughter's son as *beti nati*; a son's daughter is called *noni* or *beta natin* and a daughter's daughter as *noni bai*.

*Noni* signifies not only a son's daughter, but also a daughter, a younger sister, a wife, the husband's younger sister, the husband's younger brother's wife, the wife's younger sister, the wife's sister's daughter, a younger sister's daughter, a husband's brother's daughter. It is consequently a very comprehensive term.

A brother is called *bhai*, but the same term is also used for the father's brother's son and the husband's younger sister's husband. In fact, any man about the same age as the speaker is addressed as *bhai*.

A sister is called *bahin* or *daua*, also *baya*. *Bai* is the mother's brother's daughter and a father's sister's daughter. *Bahin beti* is the term for the elder sister's daughter and also for the younger sister's daughter.

*Bahin beta* is the eldest sister's son and the younger sister's son. A father's younger brother's son is *dada*. *Batiya* is the address used for an elder brother's son or a younger brother's son, while an elder sister's son is called *bhacha* or *bhanej*. The same term is used for a younger sister's son, the husband's sister's son, and the wife's brother's son.

*Batijin* is an elder brother's daughter or a younger brother's daughter. *Bhanejin* is an elder or younger sister's daughter, the husband's sister's daughter, the wife's brother's daughter.

Correspondingly a mother's brother is called *mama*, a term used also for a wife's father; a wife's mother and a mother's

brother's wife are called *mami*. A father's sister's husband is addressed as *mama*, and a mother's brother's wife as also a mother's elder sister are *mami*. A father's sister's son and a mother's brother's son are both called *hena*. The word *hena* is probably derived from the Ardhamagadhi *mehunya* or the Marathi *mehuna*.<sup>41</sup>

*Kaka* is the father's younger brother, as also the mother's younger sister's husband. In a cross-cousin marriage they are one and the same person. The father's younger brother's wife is called *kaki*. The mother's younger sister is called *mausi*.

*Sasur* is the husband's or wife's father, and in a wider sense also his cousin; a father-in-law is also addressed as *mama* (which is a mother's brother. In a cross-cousin marriage, the father-in-law is the mother's brother). A husband's or wife's mother is called *sas*. She is also addressed as *mami* or *phua*. A man may never marry or touch his *sas*. The wife's elder sister is called *bai*. No man may touch his wife's elder sister, or marry her. If he so much as touches her, he must pay a fine which usually consists of one or two bottles of liquor. The wife's younger sister is *nan-bai* or *sarin*. A father's elder or younger sister is called *sas* or *mausi*, the husband's elder sister *jer sas*. But a man would be allowed to marry his wife's elder sister if she happened to be his deceased elder brother's wife. A son's wife is called *bahu*, a daughter's husband *damand*.

The husband's elder brother is called *jeth*, his younger brother *dewar*. An elder sister's husband is *babu*, a younger sister's husband is called *dau*. A man calls his wife's elder or younger brother *sara*, a word, which is commonly used as an invective. There are different opinions why this term should be offensive; usually it is said that it implies the intention of dishonouring the sister of the man so addressed. But through frequent use this invective has lost much of its offensiveness.

Husbands of two sisters call each other *sarhua*.

The husband's younger sister is called *nanand*; the hus-

<sup>41</sup> Cf. I. Karve (1953): pp. 89, 149.



band's elder brother's wife *didī*.<sup>42</sup> The husband's younger brother's wife is called *deorani*.

*Samdhi* is the term by which a man addresses his son's wife's father and his daughter's husband's father, while *samdhin* is a son's mother or a daughter's husband's mother.

Certain rules of behaviour regulate the relations of kinsmen and affines. No man or woman should call his (resp. her) parents-in-law, elder or younger sisters-in-law by name. Gond and Bhumia evade the inconveniences which this rule sometimes causes by the use of nicknames of which every man and woman has at least one.

A man must avoid any intimacy with his mother-in-law, likewise a woman with her father-in-law. They should never be together alone in a room, touch each other, or speak in public with one another. A woman, though, may serve her father-in-law, bring him his meal, wash his plates and clothes, and speak to him a few hurried words. A father-in-law is not permitted to beat his daughter-in-law; but tribal law does not punish him with expulsion from the caste as Hindu law would, if he broke this rule. If, on the other hand, a woman beats her husband or father-in-law, the caste council would outcaste the man for suffering such a disgrace.

A woman's relations to her husband's elder brother are as restrained as those with her father-in-law. A woman should not speak with him, never be alone with him in the house, though they may work together in the field. She may not sit on a bed or stool (*pirha*) in his presence, nor climb a tree when he is near. While a Gond or Bhumia man is permitted to touch and clean the food-plate (*thali*) of his elder brother and the latter's wife, his wife is debarred from touching or cleaning her husband's elder brother's plate. A woman's relations with her husband's younger brothers are more intimate. Unmarried younger brothers of the husband would not even be punished by the caste council if occasionally they were known to have sexual relations with her. After the elder brother's death, the next eldest has a right to marry

<sup>42</sup> The Hindi term is *jethani*. *Didi* is probably an Uriya term, meaning 'elder sister'.

his widow. A woman, therefore, may freely speak with her husband's younger brothers, serve them their meals, wash their plates and clothes, and eat what is left over after their meals.

No social restrictions are imposed on a Gond or Bhumia woman with regard to her elder sister's husband, but she must avoid close contact with the husband of her younger sister. For a woman is permitted to marry her elder sister's husband, either after the sister's death or already in her lifetime, as a second wife.

The relations of a girl with her brothers' wives are generally good, especially as long as she herself is unmarried. A girl is often on intimate terms with her youngest brother's wife; for both belong more or less to the same age-group. A newly-wedded woman, feeling lonely and homesick in her new surroundings, often finds solace and real affection in her husband's young sister.

Around Dindori, the group of families with which a Gond or Bhumia is in relation of affinity is called *nat* (relatives) while the term *samdhi*, which elsewhere has the same meaning, is here restricted to a man's daughter-in-law's father, or a man's son-in-law's father. It does not usually include, as in other parts of Mandla District, also the latter's brothers and sisters, and the husbands of the sisters of a man's son's mother-in-law. The wives of the *nat* relatives of course also belong to this relationship.

The *nat* relationship is almost identical with what in Central India is known as *kuthumb* in Hindu society. But it differs from the *kuthumb* in that intermarriage is permissible, whereas it is forbidden in Hindu society. Moreover, *nat* relatives in Gond and Bhumia society play a more important part in the wedding and funeral ceremonies, and in the rites performed on the occasion of a outcaste's reconciliation.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Looking around for parallels we find that the importance of the *nat* relatives in the social life of the Gond and Bhumia corresponds closely to the function of the maternal uncle in South Indian society. In a society in which cross-cousin marriage is prevalent, the maternal uncle is indeed an important member of the *nat*. The similarity of the functions of the *nat* relatives in Gond and Bhumia society and



An important fact is that Gond and Bhumia prefer to marry into families with whom they already are connected by ties of affinity. *Nat nahin hai*, means that as such, and such a family is not in any way related to the family, there is little inclination to contract a marriage with a member of that family. However, this objection must not be taken too seriously, for marriage outside the *nat* does occur though not very frequently. The reason why people give preference to *nat* relatives is: 'We know them well.'

But the true reason for this preference is the institution of cross-cousin marriage so prevalent among the Gond and Bhumia. This institution is, of course, not confined to the Gond and Bhumia only, but found in many Hindu castes and tribes, especially in South India. Marriage with the daughter of a mother's brother is a general custom in Malabar, Cochin, Travancore and in the Telugu-speaking districts.<sup>44</sup>

Cross-cousin marriages among the Gond are symmetrical and asymmetrical i.e., a boy can marry, and preferably marries, his maternal uncle's daughter, resp. his paternal aunt's daughter. A man standing in *nat* relationship is not only preferred in marriage, he has even a right to demand, for instance, that his mother's brother's or his father's sister's daughter be given in marriage to him. This is spoken of as *dudh lautana*, or 'returning the milk', a figure of speech which expresses the idea that the loss of a woman to a family on marriage is compensated by the return of her daughter in marriage to the same family. If the girl is married to an outsider, her mother's brother (*mama*) may demand in compensation the payment of five rupees. This compensation is called *nen*.

While cross-cousin marriages are so prevalent, cousin marriages are practised in exceptional cases only. Marriages between the children of two brothers are, of course, out of the

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that of the maternal uncle in South India is too striking to be overlooked; the more so as among other aboriginal tribes and non-tribal castes of Central India affines do not hold the same important position. Nor are cross-cousin marriages equally frequent among them. Cf. H. Raj (1952): pp. 169 f.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. M. P. Buradkar (1944): p. 14.

question, as both belong to the same clan. The case is different in the marriage of the children of two sisters. Several times I was told on inquiry that a marriage between the children of two sisters was not permitted. Others, again, assured me that there was no objection to it. In the end I found that such a marriage was forbidden if the sisters were married to men belonging to the same clan. Since marriages between *nat* relatives are so much the rule, two sisters usually marry into the same clan. But if the two sisters were married to men belonging to different clans, the boy of the one could marry the girl of the other.

Besides the institution of the cross-cousin marriage, the Gond and Bhumia have also the custom of marriage between certain affines, the so-called levirate and the sororate. A man has the prescriptive right to marry the widow of his elder brother, and preferably he also marries his wife's younger sister, either after the former's death or already in her lifetime. In extension of this custom, the Gond and Bhumia also practise a form of marriage which may be rightly called grandparent-grandchild marriage. If neither the fundamental law of exogamy nor prohibited degrees of kinship come in the way, neither Gond nor Bhumia are disinclined to approve of marital unions between certain grandparents and grandchildren.<sup>45</sup>

Such marital unions are not permitted between grandparent and grandchild if they are lineally connected. A man, consequently, would not be permitted to marry the daughter of his daughter, but the step-daughter of his daughter, or the daughter of his step-daughter. Likewise, a man would not be allowed to marry the mother of his mother, but he could marry the step-mother of his mother, or the mother of his step-mother; or any woman, standing in the classificatory relationship of a grandmother, resp. granddaughter.

My informants stated that such marriages indeed take place, and gave me several instances of such marriages in neighbouring villages. The disparity in age in marriages between

<sup>45</sup> It appears that in the past the same form of marriage was in vogue among the Oraon of Chotanagpur. Cf. S. C. Roy (1915): pp. 352 ff.



grandfather and grandchild is not repulsive to the Gond and Bhumia, for old men often marry young girls as long as they feel vigorous enough to make them happy. Marriages between a young man and his (classificatory) grandmother are not so frequent, unless the woman is still young. A man may, thus, marry the widow of his maternal grandfather, not seldom a young woman whom his grandfather married when he was already advanced in years. According to my informants, a man may also marry the widow of his paternal grandfather, just as he could and should marry the widow of his elder brother, for the rules of levirate apply equally to both. For the same reason, a man could marry his elder brother's daughter's daughter, though not the daughter of his younger brother's daughter, since he is also prohibited from marrying his younger brother's wife. The same applies to a marriage between a man and his maternal grandfather's sister; such a marriage is permitted. However, no Gond or Bhumia is permitted to marry a daughter (or step-daughter) of his own son, as she belongs to the same clan. Nor could he marry the mother of his mother, because she is lineally related to him; but he would be permitted to marry the step-mother of his mother unless, as often happens in *nat* marriages, she was born in his own clan. [The Bhumia might legalise such a marriage, even if the (classificatory) grandmother were of the same clan, but not the Gond. The latter observe clan exogamy more vigorously.]

## 6. THE JOINT-FAMILY

The typical Gond or Bhumia joint-family consists of a man and his wife; his sons and their wives and children; his daughters until they are married (when they enter into other joint-families). Daughters married to husbands through service marriage also remain, at least for some years, in the joint-family of their parents. It is still a common rule among the Gond and Bhumia that after their marriage, sons continue to live in the house of their parents, together with their wives and children. Though the same joint-family system is also found among the Hindu castes of Central India, we need not

assume that Gond and Bhumia have borrowed this institution from them. It is in vogue all over the world.

So long as the family remains undivided it is regarded as joint in food, worship and estate. Economically, the joint family functions through the common pooling of resources and their utilization according to the needs and demands of all its members. The father is the head of the family: he is the owner of all the movable and immovable property. He manages the estate, he performs the family worship, and he alone, or his wife, may sell grain or anything else in the house. The sons and daughters-in-law may not dispose of any property. If they are found to have independent dealings, they are severely taken to task.

When the old father has grown feeble and incapable of managing the family affairs, the eldest son takes over. As long as the father is alive, the younger brothers obey their elder brother; they usually separate soon after the father's death though they may continue to live in the same hamlet (*tola*). They maintain separate households. In time of need, such relatives assist each other.

One of my Bhumia informants, for instance, had two adult sons with their wives and children living with him in a common household. Each son had a separate hut next to the parents' house, but all had their meals together. The old mother looked after the cooking, while her two daughters-in-law did the other household chores. The same man had also a son-in-law who assisted him in field-work. But this son-in-law maintained a separate household and did not eat with the members of the joint-family.

To ensure peace between the members of a joint-family, certain rules of behaviour must be observed. When there are several daughters-in-law in the house, the eldest does the cooking, while the younger ones fetch water or go to the fields for work. Sometimes they take turns. The old mother has the general supervision of the house-work. She does some odd jobs about the house, sweeps the rooms and the courtyard, minds the grandchildren, but leaves all the heavier work to the younger women. The sons and their wives are supposed to give all the money they earn to the old mother. Her



husband, the head of the joint-family, organizes the work in the fields and jungle, minds the cattle, and manages all outdoor affairs.

The joint-family system has many advantages: it is the tribal version for universal insurance, for it provides for every member and even secures for those whose ability for earning a living is impaired the security of ungrudging maintenance. There are no beggars in the Gond and Bhumia villages. The joint-family is a kind of co-operative society in which the earning members provide for the aged, the sick, the unemployed, the physically and mentally handicapped. They repay their parents and grandparents for what the latter have done for them when they were children and unable to earn, and pay in advance for the time when they will be incapacitated through age, sickness or other reasons. The joint-family has the important function of giving economic security, a function which is the more effective as it is based not merely on economic motives, but more still on affection and kinship solidarity. This is recognized even by the moneylenders. They give loans to a joint-family without demanding a security because they know that members of a tribal joint-family are bound by law and religion to pay the debts which their father or grandfather incurred. To be a member of a large joint-family, moreover, enhances one's social position in the village and caste community, for, naturally, members of a joint-family support each other when matters of their own or of public interest are at stake. It is for these reasons that every Gond and Bhumia desires to raise a large family and considers childlessness a curse.

The joint-family has disadvantages too: its younger members generally lack the incentive to earn; the awareness that they would have to share whatever they gained by special exertion or personal ingenuity with their relatives stifles their ambition. Progressive minds experience sharp opposition when they dare to deviate from traditional lines. Moreover, there is often much jealousy and nagging envy, especially among the women.

## 7. FRIENDSHIP

The custom of ceremoniously entering into a permanent friendship is of great social importance among the aboriginal tribes of eastern Mandla. It is always between members of the same sex, between two married men or women, two boys or two girls. This friendship is respected and shared by the respective families of the two friends, who, on the strength of this friendship, are supposed to render each other all the services customary between relatives: lending cattle and agricultural implements, giving small loans without interest, making presents and paying each other visits on festive occasions. The practice of concluding such friendships is obviously borrowed from the Hindus with whom it is quite popular. The Hindus call such friendships *maha prasad*. The same practice is found among the tribes of Chotanagpur.<sup>46</sup>

*Bohanai or Mithan*

A Gond or Bhumia who wants to form a lasting friendship with another man, takes two bottles of liquor and goes to his house. He says that he has come as a *bohana*. The other man perhaps replies that he is at present not in a position to give anything in return. But the self-invited friend says: 'All right. But since I have come now, let's drink the liquor all the same.' Then the other man replies: 'I promise you a calf.' Or he promises to give him a cow, or another valuable present. This visit which results in the promise of valuable presents to seal a permanent friendship is called *bohanai* (visit).

Sometimes a man is invited to come as a *bohana*. After about a year he is again invited and presented with a calf. On this occasion he must again provide drinks, two to four bottles of liquor. After the entertainment he departs with his present. But a few years later, when the calf has grown into a cow or bull, the man who presented it comes to take the animal back. He brings a few bottles of liquor along and often also a piece of cloth as a present for the wife of

<sup>46</sup> J. Hoffmann and A. van Emelen (1942): Vol. 13, p. 3761.



his friend. After a drinking bout and a dinner, he leaves with his cow or bull.

The friendly exchange of such gifts results in friendships which generally last a lifetime. Such friendships are not restricted to caste fellows, but may be formed with members of other castes as well. A man feels highly honoured if he is asked by a member of a superior caste to be his *bohana*.

If a person becomes aware that his friend from whom he got a calf is in financial difficulties, he is expected to return the gift on his own account. But it is considered bad form if the donor asks for a return of the gift. Custom demands that at the time of the wedding of the friend's child, the calf should be returned or another calf should be presented. Or, after the calf has grown into a cow and given several calves, one of these calves may be sent to the friend who had presented the cow.

The *bohana* friendship formed between two persons would be no obstacle to their children to marry each other.<sup>47</sup>

There is also an exchange of gifts without expressly forming the so-called *bohanai* friendship. When, to quote an instance, one of my Bhumia informant's sons got married, the Gond headman of the village made him the present of a piece of cloth, six cubits long. My informant returned the gift at the wedding of the headman's son; he bought fire-crackers for about the same price. Later, some time after the wedding, the headman gave him a cow, thanking him for the present of the fire-crackers. This exchange of gifts was more an expression of mutual respect and friendly feeling, but did not lead to real friendship.

At Bijora, the mother of a Gond, Rapha by name, gave a calf to Lachari, a Bhumia. Rapha, a poor servant without any cattle of his own, now went to Lachari who is the proud owner of several heads of cattle. Rapha offered to become a *bohana* friend of Lachari, probably in the hope that Lachari would present him with a calf or cow.

<sup>47</sup> In this the Gond and Bhumia differ from the Munda whose *saia* friendship is considered so sacred that there can be no intermarriage between the families of two *saia* friends. Cf. J. Hoffmann-A. van Emelen (1941): Vol. 13, p. 3762.

### Dosti

*Dosti* is a form of friendship between men only. It is concluded with a common meal and a drink of liquor. Once two men have thus become friends, they address each other always as friends (*dost*) and do not use any other name. This form of friendship exists mainly between men of different age. It is said to be really a Gond custom.

The term *dosti* has sometimes a different meaning: an unlawful intimacy between a man and woman, whether married or unmarried, is also called *dosti*.

### Sanghi

Women friends are called *sanghi*. Such friendships are formed by an exchange of hair-strings or of pearl-necklaces (*guriya*). Sometimes a girl or woman decides to buy her friend a piece of cloth as an expression of her affection. *Sanghi* friends are much together; they go together to the well to fetch water, and they like to work together in the fields. *Sanghi* friends may be separated when they get married to men living in different villages; but if they are lucky enough to get married to men who live in the same village, their friendship may last a lifetime. *Sanghi* friends are generally of the same age. If they live in different villages they should meet at least once a year.

### Jawara

*Jawara* is a form of friendship between men of about the same age. It happens that at one or the other occasion some men come together for a friendly chat or drink. A man animated by a friendly chat or by liquor may express his friendly feeling towards another man by the proposal to exchange turbans or shirts. When the other man consents, they seal their new friendship with a bottle of liquor.

### Bhajli

Women form a similar form of friendship which is called *bhajli*. They seal their friendship by an exchange of ornaments or dresses.



### Sakhi Jhori

Another form of friendship between women is called *sakhi jhori*. It exists between women who have the same number of children, either boys or girls. The woman who wants to perform *sakhi jhori* with another woman, comes to her in the company of three or four women who carry a small, earthen lamp (*diya*), some *kodo* grain and bangles on a plate. She then offers the plate with the presents to the other woman whose friendship she desires. After a few days her new friend has to return the visit. She arrives with a plate of *kodo* grain and bangles, and in the company of some singing women she hands over her gifts in front of a burning lamp. This form of friendship is said to have been introduced by people from the former Rewa State.

The origin of this custom is supposed to be as follows: Once the wife of a shepherd (Ahir) went to the jungle where she saw a bear (*balua*). Some people say that it was *Bhagwan* himself in the shape of a bear. The bear wanted to speak to the woman, or according to another version wanted water from her. But the woman was so frightened that she did not listen and ran away. When she got home, she found to her sorrow that both her children were dead. Weeping, she returned to the spot where she had met the bear, suspecting that the bear had killed her children in punishment for her disobedience. The bear again appeared to her and asked: 'Why do you cry?' The woman replied: 'Because my children have died.' The bear then said: 'Your children died because you did not listen to me. (After the other version: because you did not give me water.) But I will tell you what to do: Go back to your village and perform the *sakhi jhori* with a woman who has as many children as you had.'

It is believed that a woman who refuses to perform this rite with another woman who has the same number of children, will lose them.

### Sakhi

Two village communities may form a formal bond of friendship by a certain ceremony. But such a union is not the invention of the aborigines of eastern Mandla. It owes

its origin to the civil disobedience movement of the years 1929 and 1930, directed against British domination.

This bond of friendship between two village communities was formed in the following manner: Some men of one village got together, filled a basket (*dauri*) with *kodai* (husked *kodo*) which they collected from the villagers, added a coconut to it, and placed a lamp filled with oil (*diya*) on it. This basket they then solemnly carried to the neighbouring village. There the *kodai* was boiled, the coconut broken, and five unmarried boys and girls fed. The men of this village now refilled the basket with *kodai* of their own, placed a coconut in it and put a lamp on it. They carried the basket to a third village where the same ceremony was enacted. In this manner the local leaders of the independence movement wanted to create a strong sense of solidarity.

The same ceremony was performed in many villages throughout India; but while in the non-tribal villages the ceremony was performed once and then forgotten, the aboriginals of eastern Mandla still feel themselves bound by this vow of friendship and even repeat it at times.

Another bond of friendship was invented by the same leaders of the independence movement to unite boys and girls born in the same month, and on the same day.

The aboriginals of eastern Mandla do not seem to have adopted the custom of forming a friendship between a man and woman on the Hindu festival day of *Rakhi*. This ceremony is called *bhai-bahin banana* (to make brother and sister). Its outward expression is the tying of a string around the wrist of one another's right hand. Such friends need not observe the usual rules which restrict the relations between men and women who are not close relatives. This ceremony creates a close relationship between the two which excludes any danger of unlawful intimacy. Sexual relations between such friends would be punished like incest.

Another form of friendship which exists among Hindus—the latter call it *mahaprashad*—is also unknown among the Gond and Bhumia around Dindori.



## CHAPTER X

# INHERITANCE

### 1. PROPERTY

IN FORMER times when the Gond and Bhumia practised shifting cultivation to a much greater extent than today, fields and forests were not included in the objects which could be privately and individually owned. For this reason, most of the Gond and Bhumia lost all their landed property when the Land Settlement took place and all personal claims for land were examined. The individual members of a tribal group had no title deeds to any definite piece of land, for in their society land was in the joint possession of a whole family group, or a kinship group. A Gond or Bhumia acquired the right to the yield of a field by cultivating it; and when he left a field to clear another jungle plot in shifting cultivation, the abandoned field did not remain his private property, but fell back into the joint possession of the whole group. Another member of the group could till it and harvest it, and again abandon it. Ever since the Land Settlement Act of 1868, conditions have changed considerably. All land is now owned in accordance with the Settlement Code of the Government of India, and its acquisition, management and sale are subject to the laws and regulations of the Revenue or Forest Departments, and no longer to the traditional property concepts of the forest tribes. The Gond and Bhumia, too, had to adapt their property concepts to these new regulations, though they still do not seem quite reconciled to them.

Consequently, even if a Gond or Bhumia is fully entitled by Government rules to dispose of his immovable property as he pleases, old tribal convention does not allow him to do so. For instance, if a Gond or Bhumia has a son, he may not sell his field without the consent of this prospective heir. He cannot even donate it to his daughter or another relative.

He can only allow the use of his field as long as he is alive.

After his death, immovable property is inherited by the sons, the daughters getting no share of the inheritance.<sup>1</sup> If a Gond or Bhumia dies, leaving no son and heir, not his daughters but his brothers or brothers' sons inherit his property. Only in case he dies without any male relatives will his daughters inherit. His widow inherits immovable property only if the children are still small and she does not remarry. As soon as the eldest son comes of age, he takes charge of all the immovable property. He remains in charge as long as his brothers consent to live with him in a common household. When they separate, landed property is divided among the brothers in equal parts.

There is no law by which a Gond is forbidden to sell his house. But a Bhumia may not sell his house to any one. When a house is abandoned by a Bhumia, his relatives may move in and occupy it. Otherwise it remains empty. If a stranger wants to stay in it, he is welcome to it, provided that the former owner has really given up all claims to the house. It is not necessary to ask the former owner's permission. But generally, when a Bhumia shifts to another village, he breaks down his house, carries the beams to the place where he wants to settle and builds it up again there. Only when he settles at a distant village, does he abandon his old house and build himself a new one from the material available at the place. Since the jungle is always near to the villages where Gond and Bhumia settle, building material is comparatively easily obtained.

Nowadays, Gond and Bhumia do not change their residence as freely as in olden days, when shifting cultivation made a frequent change imperative. As the huts of the Gonds, and even more so those of the Bhumia, are still primitive and simple, no great loss is involved if a house is simply abandoned. Nor is the building of a new house a very expensive affair. At the most it requires a few days of work.

<sup>1</sup> Gond and Bhumia follow the rule of Baudhayana: 'The father protects a woman in her childhood, the husband during her youth, the son in old age; a woman has no right to independence.' Baudhayana II, 2, para 27.



As far as movable property is concerned, such as furniture, tools and implements, cattle, clothes and jewels, the head of the family is theoretically its sole owner. But his management and disposal of such family property is regulated by ancient convention. In certain cases he must ask the consent of his relatives. He may give away certain articles, but he may not sell them.

In theory, everything earned by a member of the family, even by an adult son, must be handed over to the head of the family. If two brothers live in a joint-family, the younger brother may not retain any part of his earnings. However, in practice this rule is not strictly enforced. The bulk of such earnings are of course used to support the whole joint family, but on market days those who go to the bazaar get a few coins to make small purchases for their own personal needs. The wages which a woman or girl earns in hired labour, however, are generally not used for the support of the family, but kept apart till sufficient money has accumulated for the purchase of a loincloth or sheet, either for herself or another member of the family. If no clothes are required, the money is invested in jewels or grain.

If members of the family secretly keep apart some of their earnings for their own personal use, they are severely scolded and the money thus put aside must be surrendered to the head of the family. Any dishonest dealing which benefits a particular member of the family at the cost of the others is strongly condemned. It was mentioned with strong disapproval, for instance, that in one village a widow who lived in the house of her step-son (who after the death of her husband had inherited all the property) secretly sold grain to give the money to her daughter who was married in the same village.

It is different if the housewife or a grown-up son keeps a certain part of what she, or he, has earned by a special effort. A woman who sells the eggs of the hen which is considered her private property may keep the proceeds for her private use. Also, special presents made to a girl by her lover or by relatives are hers. If a girl on her wedding day is given a cow, the calf borne by the cow is hers and she can sell it as

she pleases. Such money is called *pogri* or *kamori*. Her husband may borrow a part of this money, but only to pay the revenue tax, not for any other purpose. Of course, some women deliberately cheat their husbands and often hide money and grain, when they have reason to think that their husbands are improvident and give away, lend or use up what they have in the house. And indeed, men are afterwards pleasantly surprised when in time of need their wives come forward with their secret hoardings.

A woman on a visit to her parents may keep what she earns by work on the field of some other farmer. But when she takes leave and returns to her husband, she gives her parents a present bought with the money thus earned. If she works for her parents, however, she is not paid anything, unless she stays several months at home. In such a case, she receives on leaving a handsome present from her parents or brothers for the help rendered.

Grain bins in the house of a Bhumia may not be sold to outsiders. They may be given away, as the case may be, but no money should be taken for them, once they have been in use. It is permitted, however, to make a new grain bin on order and to accept money in payment for this. Nor may any other household articles and implements be sold after they have been used in the house. They may be given away as presents. Silver ornaments owned by men or women should not again be sold, though out of necessity they may be pawned, which is at present quite a common practice. But their sale is only permitted in a case of great necessity. It is different, though, if a Bhumia is rich and has in his possession silver or gold ornaments which he bought more as an investment than for wear. The Bhumia are not in the habit of putting their money into a bank or of buying shares; they buy gold or silver ornaments which they pawn or sell in time of need. The Gond are not so fastidious as the Bhumia; they do not hesitate to sell grain bins or other pieces of furniture, whether they have been in use or not.

Clothing which the individual Gond or Bhumia wears is private property. But members of the family may in case of necessity borrow clothes from each other. Among the



Bhumia, however, such mutual lending and borrowing of clothes is rare; it is more common among the Gond. Among the Bhumia, clothes once worn by a person may not be sold to others, nor even be given away freely, except as an expression of friendship. It is not customary among the Bhumia that younger children should wear the cast off clothes of their elders or those which they have outgrown. But the Gond are permitted to sell worn clothes to others, though to members of their own caste only. Even women may sell their clothes, not to men, however; no woman, not even among the Gond, may lend a piece of cloth to a man, if she has used it herself. But a new cloth she may lend to a close relative of hers and afterwards wear it herself.

After the death of a Bhumia or Gond, his (or her) clothes are not worn by other members of the family. Such clothes are given away to relatives by affinity (*nat*), usually to the man who performed the funeral rites. He also has the right to demand the axe (*pharsa*) of the deceased. Other articles which the deceased used, but which were not his exclusive property, like blankets, sheets, certain ornaments, etc., are not given away, but used by the other members of the family.

It is against the tradition of the Bhumia to do much in the line of buying and selling. Even grain, liquor, and other produce of their field and of the jungle are mainly for home consumption. They may be sold or exchanged in the market for foodstuffs or clothes only if in excess of home consumption. Every Bhumia and Gond knows how much grain he needs in a year for his family. Only in case of dire necessity will he sell a portion of the grain required for his family. It is, of course, not forbidden to sell, to lend or to give away small quantities of grain or other foodstuffs to persons who are in immediate need of it. Liquor that has been distilled at home may not be sold in quantities above the value of one rupee.

The Gond, who are better farmers than the Bhumia and consequently wealthier, freely sell all their surplus grain. *Kodo*, *kutki* and rice they usually sell locally; but wheat, gram, *mazur*, mustard and *ramtila* are money crops and are all sold or exchanged for commodities not self-produced.

The Bhumia generally, and the Gond to some extent, avoid cash expenses as far as possible. They endeavour to be as far as they can self-sufficient, to produce all they need themselves and to buy in the local market only the few things which they cannot produce or manufacture, such as clothes, pots, ornaments, and other small articles. They rarely buy agricultural implements or household articles. Only articles the manufacture of which requires special skill or special tools are bought in the market. Likewise those articles must be bought whose manufacture implies that the producer belongs to a low caste: these are shoes, sandals, clothes, and so on.

Though the aboriginals rarely buy much at the weekly bazaar, they nevertheless like to visit it. Such bazaars are held in all bigger villages of the district. The days for the bazaar are fixed in such an order that the traders and merchants can conveniently shift from one place to the other without losing much time. If there is a bazaar at one place on Sunday, the bazaar on Monday will be held in a village about ten miles away. From there it is shifted to a third place at about the same distance. The market opens in the afternoon so that the dealers have ample time to transport their stalls and wares to the new place in the morning and to be ready for the sale in the afternoon. Wealthy dealers and pedlars travel by horse; others engage carriers; poor traders carry their wares on their backs.

Except in the monsoon, it does not take much time and labour to put up a stall. The wares are just spread out on the ground and a bamboo mat is fixed as a roof over the goods displayed for sale. The merchant sits or squats behind his wares, patiently waiting for his customers. The stalls are arranged in the market according to the kind of goods they sell; here you find potters sitting among their pots, there, traders in brass vessels, further on others who sell foodstuff of every description, spices, baskets, winnowing scoops, cloth, ornaments, etc.

Between the stalls arranged in rows now wander the prospective buyers stopping here and there, bargaining, buying, meeting and greeting friends and relatives from other villages,



chatting, shouting, gossiping. In the aboriginal tracts the bazaar is an institution intended to satisfy the economic needs of the people, but socially it is of even greater importance. People go to the market less to buy things than to meet relatives, friends and sweethearts, to exchange news, to convey messages, to arrange marriage matches, and to settle any affairs between people of different villages. No wonder the bazaar is often mentioned in the folktales and songs of the aboriginals.

Formerly all transactions at the bazaar were made by barter. Grain is still accepted by most traders in these parts of the country. On the way to the bazaar, many aboriginals carry some grain or other products of field or garden, to pay for salt or sugar.

Certain conventions have to be observed in the purchase of goods. Some may be bought only by men, others only by women. It is a man's job to buy clothes and jewels for the womenfolk. Sometimes man and woman go to the bazaar; the woman selects the piece of cloth or the ornament she wants, but he pays the bill. It is also the man who buys pots and grinding stones (*chakia*); but earthenware, spices and foodstuff are purchased by women. However, this rule is not very strictly observed. If a woman has no time to go to the bazaar, her husband may go and buy what she wants. If a certain article can be obtained only at a distant place to which a woman cannot or may not go, her husband goes and fetches the required article. On the other hand, a woman may purchase articles which are ordinarily reserved for men. Moreover, a woman may purchase anything from her own pocket money.

It is usually the women who keep the purse. Money is wrapped in a cloth and hidden in a grain bin or in a hole in the wall. Aboriginals prefer coins; they do not like bills which might be eaten by rats or insects. The women carry a few rupees with them in a purse stuck in their loincloths when they go to the bazaar. Large sums of money are nowadays locked up in an iron box. In former times, silver coins were buried in the floor near the fireplace, or hidden in a hollow bamboo or in a buffalo horn, stuck into the roof.

The Gond often use a cow's horn as a hiding place for their money; the Bhumia will not touch a cow's horn. If a man does not trust his wife, he may entrust a friend or a village notable with his savings; for if the woman eloped, she would probably also take the money with her.

## 2. INHERITANCE

The laws of inheritance are the same for Gond, Bhumia, Panka and other castes of eastern Mandla. According to tribal law inheritance is only in the male line. Wives, mothers, sisters and daughters cannot inherit; they may get a small legacy, a brass vessel, or an iron cooking pot. When a man dies without male issue his brothers, nephews or cousins will inherit the property. However, this old tribal law may nowadays be contested: the new Indian Succession Act allows women to inherit. If they go to court, they will get their share.

Even according to the old tribal law, property which a woman brought into the family as wedding presents (*kamori*) from her father or other relatives was hers. Her husband could dispose of such property only with her consent. When the woman died, her husband and children inherited it all. A divorcee may take such wedding presents along to her new husband. However, the presents which she received at the wedding post she must leave behind. A clever woman, thinking of separating from her husband, often secretly sells off her wedding presents or hides them before she leaves. Were she asked for them after separation, their existence would be denied by her or delivery would be endlessly delayed. Goats, cows and buffaloes which a woman may have brought into the family, she must leave behind. But when the divorce has been decreed and the amount of compensation is settled by the village council, the value of these animals is deducted from the amount which the new husband would have to pay for her. She may also take along jewels of her own, but not such ornaments which her husband gave her.

After the death of their father, all sons inherit in equal shares (*bata*). Only the son who supports his mother and



unmarried sisters gets a bigger share. But usually brothers stay together as long as their mother is alive. When she dies, they divide the property among themselves. If at the time of the father's death a daughter is not yet marriageable, she stays with her brothers, or with one of them if they have separated. The girl works for the brother who supports her. When she marries, he pays the wedding expenses. It is his task to choose a husband for her.

Brothers who separate after the death of their father often keep the field in common possession. They cultivate it as a whole, and only divide the harvest. Sometimes it happens that a son wants to separate from his father when the latter is still alive. If he is the only son, he has a right to demand half of the property. But his father usually refuses to part with so much property and merely gives him a bullock. Only after his father's death does he inherit the whole property. If there are several sons, and one separates while the others stay with the father, he gets his full share immediately, but nothing on his father's death. This happened recently to a Gond who had separated very early from his father. As the son had taken in marriage the wife of another man, his father had to pay a fine of fifty rupees and four bullocks for his reconciliation. The other brothers refused to give him anything when the old father died. They rightly thought that he had cost his father dearly enough. If, however, all the sons decide to separate from their father, they may claim at once half the father's property and divide it among themselves.

If one son remains with the father, while the other sons separate, he gets his share of the property only after his father's death, while his brothers receive their shares—though not the complete shares—at the time of separation. After the father's death a redistribution of the whole property is made. At this redistribution the son who remained with the father until the latter's death, receives a bigger share of the property, for it is he who has to defray the expenses of the funeral feasts. The other sons may also contribute a certain amount, but the bulk of the expenses is met by the son who remained with his father. When the brothers cannot come to an agreement over the inheritance, they may appeal to the village

council. Many disputes are amicably settled by the elders of the village. Such disputes arise, of course, only if the father has left considerable property and if there are several claimants who hope to benefit from it.

A youth, serving for the daughter of a deceased Gond or Bhumia, inherits all the property if there is no other male heir. If the deceased had a nephew, most of the family property goes to him, while the son-in-law (*lamsena*) gets less than half of the property. If the *lamsena* had received a present from his father-in-law, he need not return it after the latter's death. If the son-in-law had stayed with his father-in-law, while the sons of the family lived in separate households, he gets half of the property. In order to avoid disputes about the inheritance, the parents-in-law give the husband of their daughter a part of the property before they die. The earnings of a son-in-law during his service for his wife, however, are deducted and handed over to him, when the rest of the property is divided by the sons.

If a man dies without any male issue, his property is inherited by his brothers. If he lived with his brothers in a joint household, his own children remain with their uncles. They get their share of the family property only when their uncles separate. Then the share due to their father is handed over to them. They may again divide it among themselves or manage it as a joint estate. All this sounds rather complicated, but usually it is a simple affair, as aboriginal families are generally neither large nor wealthy.

After the death of a man, his children are taken care of by his brothers even if these live in separate households. The children are adopted by their uncles if their mother decides to remarry. If she consents to live with the next eldest brother of her husband, her children go with her. If she wants to remain single, the children are left to her and she is free to bring them up without any interference by her late husband's brothers. On no account may an elder brother marry the widow of his younger brother.

A widow who marries outside the family of her late husband may keep a child at breast; when the child becomes of age, he inherits the father's property. The step-father does not get



anything whatsoever for bringing up the child.

Theoretically, an adopted son inherits all the property of his foster-parents. But if more or less distant kinsmen claim a share, the village council to which they may appeal often allots a portion of the inheritance to them.

Even second cousins have a right to inheritance, if there are no nearer relatives at hand. According to tribal law, they inherit before the daughters of the deceased. Even the claim of a son-in-law who served the deceased in order to receive his daughter in marriage, is not strong enough to refute the claim of a second cousin.

If a man leaves two wives and there are no sons to inherit, the property goes to the first wife. But the second wife has a right to sustenance as long as she remains unmarried. If she wants to separate, she is given a quarter of the whole property, *adhi ki adha*. If she remarries, she gets no share of the property.

If a polygamous man has male issue from both wives, they inherit equal shares after his death. The sons of the first wife enjoy no preferential treatment.

If the widow marries the next younger brother of her late husband, the children are adopted by him and are treated like his own children. They inherit with their step-brothers and receive equal shares after their step-father's death.

## CHAPTER XI

### CASTE ORGANIZATION

#### 1. RELATIONS TO OTHER SUB-GROUPS

##### (a) *Among the Gond*

THE GOND, who like to call themselves *thakur* (landlords) or *kisan* (farmers), are proud to belong to the great Gond caste. They are well aware of the fact that they are a strong race and at one time were the rulers of Gondwana. Beyond this sense of solidarity, however, there exists no strongly-knit union among the various Gond sub-sections. For all practical purposes, all the sub-sections are different castes: there is no inter-marriage nor inter-commensality, and the members of each sub-section are firmly convinced that for some imaginary reason they are superior to the members of other sub-sections.

Some fifteen or twenty years ago a union of all Gond was formed at Nagpur and Jabalpur. This union included, however, merely the Gond living in the Central Provinces (Madhya Pradesh), not those of other Provinces or of the former Native States. Moreover, the aims of this union were not the social or economic betterment of the caste, but the preservation of their ritualistic purity. It started its activity by first breaking all social contacts with castes lower than theirs, with the Baiga, Panka and others, for instance; it prohibited the drinking of liquor and the eating of pork, and made the eating of beef a major crime; it reduced the 'bride-price', adapted the dress of the Gond women to that of the high-caste non-tribal women, suppressed the sometimes gaudy and primitive ornaments of the Gond women for the more refined jewellery of the non-tribal women, and discouraged the traditional dances and songs. In the villages where non-tribal influence was already very powerful, these new laws were rigorously enforced and at least for some time generally



observed. But in the remote jungle villages, conservatism proved too strong; the Gond refused to submit to these new regulations. The Gond are of too independent a character to submit meekly to such a strict discipline, and there is no supreme authority to enforce such regulations. The attempt made by this union to persuade the Gond caste completely to accept Hindu beliefs and customs failed; only those Gond submitted who stood under strong Hindu influence, while the other sub-sections proved recalcitrant.

We can only speak of some sort of solidarity among the Gond of a certain area, say, in a circle of twenty or thirty villages, where people know each other. Persons who know each other well enough to eat together without fear of being made outcastes for doing so, belong together, they also intermarry and form a social unit, the so-called *bhai-biladeri*. But strangers, though they may swear that they belong to the same sub-section, are regarded with suspicion and even hostility. This is probably one of the main reasons why the Gond of one sub-section are so ignorant of the customs and beliefs of another sub-section of their tribe. Each sub-section keeps aloof from the other, motivated by a strong fear of ritual pollution. It is this fear of pollution which makes them so exclusive and parochial, and limits the treatment of persons as human beings with human wants and needs to their own *bhai-biladeri*. The person outside is a stranger and a potential enemy.

In Mandla District we come across four sub-sections of the Gond: highest in social rank are the Deo-Gond. They are fully Hinduised, abstain from eating meat of any kind and from drinking liquor. They observe endogamy.

The second section is called Suryabansi Raj-Gond (the sun-born ruling Gond).<sup>1</sup> They are supposed to be descendants

<sup>1</sup> The name is obviously borrowed from the Rajput clan Surajvansi, one of thirty-six royal clans. The name 'Surajvansi' may also be used as a generic term denoting any Rajput belonging to a clan of the solar race, and it seems likely that it may have been adopted by families of the cultivating castes who aspired to become Rajputs. The Gond of the Suryabansi group obviously followed their example. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, p. 467.

of Suryabansi or Suryavanshi, the elder brother of Ravan, the demon-king of Lanka, who in the fight with Lakshman hid behind his mother, the sun-goddess.

The third section calls itself Suryabansi Deogarhia Gond (the sun-born Gond of Deogarh). Deogarh was the old capital of a Gond kingdom near Chhindwara. These two Suryabansi sections claim equal status with the non-tribal cultivating classes and in the Hindu caste system assume the rank of Kshattriyas. The Brahmins will take water from them. The Raj-Gond generally observe the same caste rules as the Rajputs. According to Forsyth, they are in many cases the descendants of alliances between Rajput adventurers and Gond women. But recently any wealthy Gond proprietor willing to submit to Rajput caste rules could get his family admitted into the Raj-Gond community.

The fourth and lowest section is that of the Ravanbansi Gond. In some parts of Mandla, Deogarhia Gond still accept Ravanbansi Gond girls as wives, but do not give their daughters in marriage to Ravanbansi boys. Nor do they inter-dine with them. The Hinduised Raj-Gond want to make all the world believe that these Ravanbansi Gond are no true Gond at all; they are outsiders who have usurped the fair name of Gond. The Raj-Gond are ashamed of these caste-fellows because they eat beef and pork, and do not observe the Hindu customs.

About thirty years ago, some Raj-Gond started a reform movement which aimed at the complete absorption of the Gond by Hinduism and at the incorporation of the Gond into Hindu society with the rank of Kshattriyas.

The principles and aims of this movement are well expressed in a pamphlet bearing the title *Gondon dharm bichar* ('On Gond-lore'). It starts with an exhortation in verse to 'restore the old customs (*dharm*)'. The author then explains that Gondwana (mainly Mandla District) was of old the habitat of the Gond. There they ruled. The power of the Gond race can be gauged from the mighty ruins of their old forts. In this vein the author proceeds and tries to prove that the Gond are really Kshattriya by caste. For did not the Gond king Dalpatska marry a Kshattriya princess, Dewi Durgawati, the



daughter of the Chandela Kshattriya king of Mahoba? With apparent reluctance, however, the author admits that in the holy scriptures of Hinduism, in the *shastras*, the Gond are not mentioned as Kshattriyas. The reason why the Hindus do not recognize the Gond as Kshattriyas and on the contrary rather despise them, is in his opinion the bad behaviour of the Ravanbansi Gond who eat beef, sacrifice pigs and chickens and drink liquor. He is convinced that the Gond could recover their old status as Kshattriyas if they reformed their ways. He then proposes that a stiff fine should be imposed on persons who defy Hindu caste rules and eat beef, pork and chicken, and drink liquor.

In another pamphlet of the same stamp, bearing the title of *Gond Dharm Purana* ('A Summary of the Gond Religion'), published in 1929 by Bhausingh Rajnegi of Balaghat District, *Bara deo*, the supreme God of the Gond, is identified with Shiva. The pamphlet gives in the form of a discussion between Shankar and Parvati a short account of Gond history, describes their noble birth and later depravement, and attributes their downfall to the fact that the Gond gave up the worship of Rama and adopted ritually impure customs. The author devotes the last pages of his booklet to the proposal of new rules and regulations which the Gond should adopt with the aim of ritual purification. The author is confident that ritually-pure Gond would certainly be accepted by high-caste Hindus as their equals.

There have been several cases of Brahmins presenting the sacred thread to the Gond. Those Gond who have adopted the sacred thread call once a year a Brahmin who recites certain stories for their edification and admonishes them to abstain from eating chicken, drinking liquor, yoking cows to the plough or harrow, etc. The Gond listen attentively, and promise to obey the rules of Hinduism; then the Brahmin is entertained with a meal, given a present, and off he goes. He may also be called to grace with his presence a wedding or a funeral feast.

Hindu influence is particularly strong in the villages along the Narbada River. There Brahmin families are found in every big village. They attend to the religious needs of the

Gond, each Brahmin being in charge of three or four villages. The Gond in these villages respect the Brahmins as their spiritual leaders (*guru*). These villages are also frequently visited by Hindu monks (*yogis*) and pilgrims who perform the *parikrama* (circumambulation) of the Narbada: walking from the mouth of the river at Broach to its source at Amarkantak on one side of the river and back on the other side. The journey usually lasts three years. Such pilgrims often stop for a shorter or longer time in the Gond villages of Mandla District and are entertained by the village headmen. In return for food and lodging, they instruct their aboriginal hosts in the tenets, myths and legends of Hindu religion. The traditional bards of the Gond, the Pardhan, also instruct the aboriginals in the Hindu religion.

(b) *Among the Bhumia*

All that we have said of the Gond caste organization holds good also for the Bhumia. They too consider for all practical purposes their own sub-section as a separate and independent endogamous caste. Within their own sub-section, we must think of the Bhumia as a loose aggregate of several regional groups, each such regional group comprising a number of neighbouring villages, that is, ten to twenty village communities. Within a convenient area several—say ten to twenty—such village communities are interrelated by marriage, and have moreover a more or less uniform set of caste regulations and conventions; at times these groups meet to settle social disputes of greater importance and wider significance, not just such as arise from marital relations, breach of caste laws, witchcraft, property disputes, etc. These regional groups need not be mistaken for independent tribal units, as no regional group is set in a water-tight compartment. We may conceive of the Bhumia of eastern Mandla as an endogamous sub-section of the Baiga tribe, divided into a number of overlapping circles of regional groups, which are formed by ten to twenty village communities.

While the various sub-sections of the Gond tribe are proud to belong to this great tribe, the Bhumia—though doubtlessly a sub-section of the Baiga tribe and returned as Baiga by the



census officials—often resent to be called Baiga and insist on being listed as a separate caste, as Dewar (priests) or Bhumia (men of the soil).

The Bhumia permit intermarriage with the Binjhwar Baiga, another sub-section of the Baiga tribe, though the latter neither interdine nor intermarry with them. They give as reason for this permission that both Bhumia and Binjhwar descend from the same ancestor. But so do the Bharia Baiga, and still the Bhumia refuse to intermarry with them. The real reason why the Bhumia allow intermarriage with the Binjhwar is that the latter, in true Hindu fashion, have established their claim of being superior to all other Baiga sub-sections and neither interdine nor intermarry with them. They make no exception with the Bhumia.

As already mentioned, the Bhumia treat the Bharia Baiga as their social inferiors. They call them the lower caste (*chhoti jat*) while they themselves are the superior caste (*unchi jat*). The Bhumia say that the Bharia formerly accepted food from their hands though some time ago the Bharia decided not to do so anymore. The Bharia Baiga are treated as inferiors because they eat beef which the Bhumia never do.

## 2. CASTE ORGANIZATION IN THE VILLAGE

While neither Gond nor Bhumia have any strong tribal organization, with either tribal chiefs or caste headmen (*jat patel*) in the manner of the Hindus, there exists some caste authority within the boundaries of each village. But this organization is almost inextricably interwoven with the management of the village community as such; it includes also other castes.

Each caste in the village has its leader or leaders. Usually they are the heads of the joint families, or men to whom their caste fellows look up for reasons of wealth or special abilities which they possess. These men lay down the law in matters which concern purely their own particular group in the village community. If, for instance, a Bhumia ate dinner with a low-caste man, this would be purely and

exclusively a matter to be discussed and punished by the Bhumia of the village. The Gond in the same village will not concern themselves with the affair.

In matters which affect the interest or the reputation of the village as such, however, the leaders of all the castes in the village come together to discuss and settle the issue. The number of castes in a village of eastern Mandla is generally small; Gond and Bhumia are generally by far in the majority, then follow the Panka, Pardhan, Agaria, Ahir and others and perhaps a single Brahmin family may assume a position of prominence. If at any other place there is a large number of families belonging to another caste, to the Lamana (Banjara) for instance, they most likely form a village of their own. In the bazaar villages and along the district roads, however, we also find a large number of non-tribal castes.

Until this agitation for ritual purity and caste supremacy set in, Gond and Bhumia in their villages were on very friendly terms. They not only interdined, but quite often also intermarried. No wonder, consequently, that in matters of 'caste' Gond and Bhumia made no distinction. The Bhumia attended the caste meetings of the Gond, and the Gond those of the Bhumia. To a large extent it is still so. The management of a village is thus generally equivalent to the management of the caste community in the village.

For the Government, of course, the village headman (*mukaddam* or *patel*) is the responsible representative of the village community. He is usually also the caste leader (*syana*). But if in the eyes of the people he is not acceptable for certain reasons, another village notable is chosen as caste leader. Each caste in the village is thus represented by one or several prominent men of their community. They are called *syana* (elders). Together they form the village council (*panch* or *panchayat*, lit. quintette) which discusses and decides not only issues pertaining to the village as such, but often also matters which concern a particular caste community. The elders of one caste are, of course, perfectly conversant with the rules and regulations prevalent in the other castes and may therefore be equally capable of giving sound advice as the elders of that particular caste. While



their decisions are binding for their own caste, they are accepted as mere advice by the other castes.

The affairs of each village community are thus managed by the leaders of the castes living in the village. However, when more important issues are at stake, all adult male villagers of all castes are summoned to a council. The procedure at such a meeting of the village council resembles that of a court of law, with the committee (*panch*) as a bench of judges and the rest of the villagers as a jury.

Usually the village council only meets when summoned, either by the complainant who wishes to have a case investigated or by the offender who has informally been made an outcaste by public opinion, pending the decision of the council, and now wishes either to establish his innocence or to obtain a fair judgement. The usual punishment imposed by the village council for a breach of the caste laws consists in a fine, in feasts to the caste or village community, in a pilgrimage to some famous shrine. Excommunication from the caste is the last resort and the highest punishment. For certain offences excommunication follows automatically; the village or caste council has only to establish whether the offence was really committed or not.

The village or caste council, as the case may be, tries breaches of the social, religious and occupational traditions of each caste; it arbitrates in disputes between members of the same and of different castes; it prevents members of the caste from adopting an occupation or mode of life contrary to caste tradition or involving social degradation.

The village or caste council makes strenuous efforts to settle old quarrels within the village without recourse to the courts of law. Though the village elders exercise no authorised civil or criminal powers, peace and good order in the village depend to a large extent on their administration and arbitration.

The advantage of the *panchayat* trials lies not so much in the just chastisement of an offender as in the hearing of the dispute in the atmosphere and the surroundings familiar to the parties. In a village, the true facts usually are known to all, and there is less inducement to misrepresentation of

the case on trial. There is thus a better chance that the case is adjudicated justly. But often it does not even come to a judgement; many quarrels are settled by compromise, and bitter feelings are soothed. Much money is saved which otherwise would be spent in long litigations.

In the village or caste council, a man's position is doubtlessly much enhanced by his wealth and by a backing of many relatives. Eloquence is likewise appreciated. But age, knowledge and wisdom count for more, so at least my informants told me. As wisdom and experience come with age, elderly people generally enjoy high respect. Nevertheless, even a young man will be heard if he is intelligent and has something to say in the council which makes sense. However, old people have still another point in their favour: they know the caste traditions thoroughly and remember how their forefathers decided matters in similar situations.

Regard for the good opinion of their caste and village fellows is a strong motive for good behaviour among the members of aboriginal society. For each individual's livelihood depends on the co-operation of neighbours and fellow villagers, and his general well-being on their approval of his actions. The control which the village and caste councils thus exercise in a village is on the whole of beneficial influence on the moral standard of the individuals. It has perhaps to some extent blunted their sense of responsibility for their own actions to a higher authority, so that the aboriginals of eastern Mandla indeed share widely the conviction of the non-tribals of lower castes that a sin is no wrong as long as it is not found out. On the other hand, there is no possible doubt that both Gond and Bhumia have quite definite ideas about good and bad. Their ethical code may differ somewhat from that of the non-tribals; but that they know how to make a difference between good and bad they prove quite clearly and emphatically in their complaints when they themselves have been wronged.

The weakness of the principles on which the aboriginals base their ethical convictions becomes apparent, however, when these principles are no longer supported by public opinion. Aboriginals soon sink to a low level of social and



moral standards once they leave their native environment and lack the wholesome checks provided by their caste and village community. Their ignorance, poverty and different ways of behaviour do not allow an easy assimilation by a social group of some standard in their new environment. Moreover, their traditional sexual laxity makes their women accessible to other men on whom they depend for a living. The inevitable consequence is their degradation to the level of low castes or 'untouchables'.

### 3. RELATIONS TO OTHER CASTES

#### (a) *Of the Bhumia*

The Bhumia maintain that theirs is the highest caste. No caste, they say, can be compared with theirs because they are the oldest settlers in the country and, in fact, the very soil of the land is theirs.

For this reason, and in order to retain their social status, they are very cautious in dealings with members of other castes. Other tribes may be rather lax in observing the Hindu regulations of commensality, but not the Bhumia. They have very strict rules in this matter and observe them to the letter.

A Bhumia is permitted to accept water from a Brahmin, and also cooked food. But if the Brahmin is not well-known to him, the Bhumia will refuse to accept any food or water from him. To be on the safe side, he thus escapes the risk of being cheated.

A Bhumia may accept cooked food from a Gond and a Gawal Ahir (shepherd). From a fisherman (Dhimar) he may accept water, but cooked food only if he is on a journey. Even then he may not eat it in the hut of the Dhimar. The same rules apply also to smoking with other persons. A Bhumia may accept the clay pipe from a Gond though nowadays a Gond must refuse to take it from a Bhumia.

On the other hand, no Gond, Ahir, or Dhimar may eat food prepared by a Bhumia. The Panka, who want to be on an equal footing with the Gond, now also refuse to accept food from a Bhumia, since the Gond stopped interdining with the

latter. On the part of the Panka this regulation is pure snobbery, since no caste in eastern Mandla will consider the Panka of equal status with the Gond.

The Gond stopped interdining with the Bhumia some twenty years ago. The motive for this decision was social prestige and a slavish imitation of the high-caste Hindus. The Bhumia have always protested against this decision and feel it as a blot on their honour. In out-of-the-way villages, the Gond still continue to dine with Bhumia. But where non-tribal influence prevails, a Gond would be made an out-caste were he found eating with a Bhumia.

### (b) *Of the Gond*

The Gond who claim to be of Kshatriya descent now follow the example of the Rajput as far as their contact with members of other castes is concerned. Like the Rajput, they accept water and food prepared by a Brahmin, Ahir or Dhimar. In former times, as already mentioned, they interdined with the Bhumia; but in most villages of eastern Mandla this has been stopped. The Gond still smoke the clay pipe (*chillam*) with the Bhumia, though not the leaf pipe (*chungi*). The Hinduised Gond do not accept food prepared by such high-caste men as Bania (merchants) or Thakur (Rajput), because members of these castes refuse to accept food and water from the Gond.

According to a pamphlet written in Hindi by a Gond named Kashiram Bhoi, a Gond may not eat food or accept water from a Teli, Nai, Dhobi, Kumhar, Chamar, Dom, Kasai, Bhangi, Basor, Veshya, Rakshas, Yawan, Jahudi, Habshi, Christian, Nagarchi, Kandaba, Ganda, Pathan, Mahar, Kori, etc. Kashiram Bhoi even maintains that if a Gond accepted food or water from a member of the above-mentioned castes he would be made an outcaste and never again readmitted into the Gond caste. This may be true if a Gond would habitually associate with members of a low caste, but not if it happened once or twice.

The Raj-Gond do not allow members of low castes to draw water from their well; no *mehtar* (sweeper) or *chamar* (tanner) could do that. And they deny this right even to



beef-eating Gond, though Bhumia are permitted to draw water from the same well.

In the villages less exposed to non-tribal influence, however, the Gond are generally more tolerant and even lax in the enforcement of these rules of contact. Compared with the Bhumia, they are definitely more self-assured and less concerned about the opinion of other people. The recent Government regulations against caste discrimination have had little effect so far in eastern Mandla.

#### 4. MARRIAGE OUTSIDE THE CASTE

Generally speaking, Gond and Bhumia may not marry outside their respective sub-sections, which are endogamous. It is no longer possible to marry one's daughter to a caste fellow unless one knows him and his family well. It is all important that a prospective son-in-law should belong to one's own endogamous group; one can be sure of this only if one knows his family and kinsmen well. For these reasons, the Gond, and to some extent also the Bhumia, do not like to marry their daughters into distant villages to families with whom they are only slightly acquainted. Another reason is that they want to see their daughters often. If they lived in distant villages, this would be impossible.

Marriage outside the endogamous caste group is punished with expulsion from the caste community. Offences against this rule may be more or less serious; the punishment is the more severe, the greater the offence. Women are more severely punished than men if they have offended against the marriage rules.

##### *(a) Among the Bhumia*

A Bhumia who marries a woman of a caste from whose members he may not accept water or cooked food is made an outcaste by his endogamous group. He can only be taken back if he dismisses the woman. But if he has accepted food prepared by the woman, he is permanently made an outcaste without any hope of ever being reconciled to his own community. Once a Bhumia has associated with the caste fellows

of his wife, they may be Kol, Panka, Pardhan or even Bharia Baiga, he has deliberately placed himself outside his own caste. But if he had been careful enough to keep his low-caste wife at a distance, and had never eaten with her, he could be readmitted after paying a fine, performing the purification ceremonies a spending a large sum of money on caste dinners.

Nor may a Bhumia marry a woman of a high caste; he is made an outcaste even if he marries a Brahmin girl. An exception is made only if his wife is a Gond or Ahir. Women of these castes are admitted into the Bhumia caste without any special ceremonies; they become Bhumia by getting married to a Bhumia.

If a Bhumia woman marries outside the caste, it depends on the social status of her husband whether she may, after a divorce or his death, return to her community or not. If she marries a Gond, she is not even made an outcaste. And if a Gond is made an outcaste by his own community for marrying her, the Bhumia allow him to live and to dine with them. This manner of life is called *khandan*. Such a Gond is not exactly considered a member of the Bhumia caste; in the eyes of the Bhumia he remains a Gond, though his own caste fellows may assume that he has joined the Bhumia caste. He may eat, drink and smoke with the Bhumia, attend their caste meetings, even divorce his wife and marry another Bhumia and still remain a Gond. This is proved by the fact that, at least in the past, his children from his Bhumia wife were adopted into the Gond caste. It is only during the last thirty years that the Gond decided not to accept such children any more. Now the latter are compelled to remain among the Bhumia and also to marry Bhumia. The Gond, by their decision, follow the general Hindu principle that the children of a mixed marriage assume the caste of the parent who belongs to the lower caste. The Gond consider the Bhumia as socially inferior; that is why they cannot any more adopt the children of a Bhumia-Gond marriage. The Bhumia protest against this decision; but they are powerless.

Some years ago, it happened at Bijora that a Bhumia girl eloped with a Gond boy. The couple went to Assam to work



in the tea-gardens, the usual refuge for such couples. After some years they returned to Bijora; their union had been blessed with a girl. As soon as the couple set foot in the village, the man was made an outcaste by his caste community. The Bhumia, too, held a caste meeting; they were angry that the Gond had been made an outcaste for marrying a Bhumia. They now proposed that the daughter of the couple should be admitted into the Gond caste. But the Gond refused this proposal saying that it was against their new caste rules. The Bhumia thereupon admitted the Gond into their community, but emphatically protested against the decision of the Gond caste council and declared that in their eyes the Gond would always remain a Gond and his children too would be Gond though their mother was a Bhumia. The Gond could not agree to this. In the end they proposed a compromise: they would adopt the sons of the couple, the daughters however should be Bhumia. Just at that time the daughter of the couple died, and the question was shelved; the discussion will revive if another child is born to the couple.

A Bhumia woman who marries an Ahir is granted the same privilege as a woman marrying a Gond.

If a Bhumia girl marries a man of any caste from whose members the Bhumia may not accept cooked food or water, she is made an outcaste and never readmitted into the community. Such a marriage took place some years ago at Duhania where a Bhumia married a Panka. She now dresses as a Panka though she still wears the tattoo marks of a Bhumia on her body.

If a Bhumia girl marries a man from a caste from whose members the Bhumia accept water, she may be reconciled to the community, provided she leaves her husband. She must undergo purification after a period of seclusion. Her relatives or her new husband are ordered to pay a fine and to give a certain number of caste dinners.

#### *(b) Among the Gond*

If a Gond marries outside his caste, he is made an outcaste as long as his unlawful liaison lasts. Technically, marriage with any woman of another caste puts a Gond out of caste

whether she is of high or of low caste. No Gond is barred from readmittance for the mere fact of marrying a low-caste woman; it is for accepting food prepared by her or her caste fellows that a Gond may be formally and permanently expelled from his caste.

A Gond who marries a woman of the Ahir caste, is made an outcaste. But the children of such a union are admitted into the Gond community. When they are grown up they marry with Gond.

If a Gond marries a woman of the Bhumia caste, he is made an outcaste. In former times, it was the custom in all villages of eastern Mandla to admit the children of such a union into the Gond community. Nowadays, such children are still admitted by the Gond in the more remote jungle villages; where the Gond are in closer touch with non-tribal ways they do not admit such children any more into their community.

A Gond who marries a Brahmin or Dhimar girl is readmitted into his caste as soon as he separates from his wife. The children of such a union are, however, not accepted by the Gond into their caste. A Gond who not only marries a low-caste wife, but also associates with her caste fellows, eats and drinks with them, is made an outcaste and cannot be reconciled to his community. If he only sleeps with a low-caste wife, but does not accept food prepared by her, he may be readmitted as soon as he sends her away.

If a Gond girl marries a member of a caste from whom the Gond may accept water or cooked food, she can be reconciled after she leaves the man. The Gond who marries her, or her parents, must pay the expenses of her purification. There are some Gond who maintain that no girl who associates with a man of another caste however high should ever be pardoned. But fortunately for the Gond women gone astray this view is not shared by the majority of the Gond.

If a Gond girl marries a man of low caste, a Chamar for instance, or a Mehtar, Panka, Dhulia or Agaria, she is never taken back by her own community. If the woman is forcefully abducted and raped by a member of these castes she can be readmitted after purification in the Narbada (*asnan*), and payment of Rs. 40 to the *panch*. But if she is with child



or has borne a child from such a union, she cannot be taken back into the caste.

### 5. BREACH OF THE CASTE RULES

#### (a) *Incest*

Sex relations between persons related in a prohibitive degree are considered as incest (*anit*). Compared with the other tribes of Central India, Gond and Bhumia take a rather less severe attitude towards offenders of the incest rules. They believe, however, that incest is punished by *Bhagwan* with sickness, usually a skin disease, worms in wounds, or leprosy. Generally such unlawful sex relations are punished with expulsion from the caste, but the gravity of the offence depends on the degree of relationship existing between the two offenders. A marital union of kinsmen related in the first and second degree, as between parents and children, or brothers and sisters, is absolutely forbidden in both castes. The condition for reconciliation after excommunication is the separation of the offenders.

Among the Gond, no marital union between members of the same clan (*gotra*) is tolerated, even if the two persons are otherwise not related. The Bhumia, too, forbid such a union, but they do not insist on separation if the partners to such a marriage are willing to pay their fine and to give the required caste dinners to effect their reconciliation.

Though Gond and Bhumia prefer to marry into families with whom they are already related by affinity, there are some degrees of affinity which are prohibitive. A man may not marry, for instance, the widow of his younger brother, the elder sister of his wife, his mother-in-law or daughter-in-law. But while in most cases of affinity a marriage within a forbidding degree can be legalised by paying a fine and giving a caste dinner, marriage between a man and his mother-in-law or daughter-in-law would never be tolerated. The caste council would insist on separation before the culprits could be reconciled to the community.

While instances of incest between kinsmen are rare, they are rather frequent between affines. A few instances will now

be related to show how offences against the incest rules are dealt with by the caste council.

At one village, a man married the wife of his elder brother. He would have been entitled to marry her after his brother's death, but could not wait so long. When he eloped with his elder brother's wife, he was made an outcaste by the village council, but readmitted after paying a fine and giving a caste dinner. It took him a few years to get the money together to pay the expenses of his readmission. His offence would not have been so severe, had he married his brother's second wife, married by *hardi-pani*,<sup>2</sup> but he eloped with his brother's first wife, married with proper wedding rites. Still his offence was not serious enough for the caste council to demand a separation of the lovers.

Cases are known also of an elder brother eloping with the wife of his younger brother. At one village where this happened the offenders were made outcastes, but after some time readmitted into the community. They had to pay a fine and to give several caste dinners. No separation was demanded.

At another village, a woman ran away from her husband whom she had married by *hardi-pani* rites and with whom she had been staying for only a few months. She eloped with a son of her husband's paternal uncle. She as well as the family of her lover (his father, mother, and other relatives living in the same house) were at once made outcastes. Though the father of the woman's new husband is a man of considerable influence, they all will have to wait several years until they can be readmitted into the caste. The reconciliation will cost them a considerable amount of money, the fine will be heavy, and several caste dinners will be required, for as the marriage took place with a kinsman of the woman's former husband, the offence is regarded as a serious breach of the incest rules.

There is a curious custom which well illustrates the attitude of Gond and Bhumia towards incest. Two men start quarrelling. Exasperated by a long dispute and very angry, one man says to the other: 'I don't want to see you any more.

<sup>2</sup> See *hardi-pani* marriage.



If after this you come once more to my house, I will take it as if you had misbehaved with your own mother.' The other man is bound by convention to accept this challenge and to avoid the house of his adversary. If he ever entered it, he would be charged in the same way as if he were guilty of incest with his own mother.

(b) *Pre-marital and Extra-marital Sex Relations*

Pre-marital chastity is not very highly valued in Gond and Bhumia girls. No bridegroom is apparently very upset if he finds that his bride is no virgin. He is probably not even aware of the difference. A girl is regarded as a virgin as long as she is unmarried and has not yet had a child; absence of the hymen is no indication that the girl is no virgin.

If an unmarried girl has a love affair with a man and the liaison results in pregnancy, the girl is called before the caste council when her state becomes known. The girl is asked to reveal the child's father. If it can be arranged, she enters his house as his wife without further ceremony. The *hardi-pani* ceremony, however, is rarely omitted. Children of such an unlawful liaison do not suffer for the sin of their parents. They enjoy the same rights as children of a regular marriage. They belong to the clan of their father.

If the lover for some reason refuses to marry the pregnant girl, she is made an outcaste. After the birth of her child, she may be readmitted into the caste community. Her parents or the man who wants to marry her must pay the expenses of her purification.

If the woman refuses to disclose the name of its father, he himself may come forward and father the child. Sometimes another man who is anxious to marry the girl in spite of her state, may claim to be the child's father. Not seldom a man can be found to father the child in order to save its mother from dishonour. The woman then has no choice but to marry the man. The marriage is by *hardi-pani*.

If the woman absolutely refuses to name the father of the child and if no man volunteers to father the child, the woman is made an outcaste and never readmitted into the caste, for it is suspected that the woman had an affair with a low-caste

man. Punishment in such a case is permanent expulsion from the caste.

Mere sex-play among half-grown children may be punished by their parents or other persons who become aware of it. It is no matter for the village council. Nor is homosexuality or bestiality punished by the caste council. Instances of perverse sexuality are but rare among the Gond and Bhumia in villages less exposed to non-tribal influence.

### *Adultery*

Adultery is punished if the offence becomes public. If the culprits are caught, they are made outcastes. To be readmitted into the caste, the erring woman's husband has to pay the fine and give the caste dinners which the caste council decrees. It is more serious if the woman carries on an affair with a man of another caste. If he is of a good caste, an Ahir for instance, the case is treated as if the woman had misbehaved with a man of her own caste. But if the woman has a love affair with a man of low caste, with a Panka, Agaria, or Kol, for instance, she is made an outcaste and may never be readmitted into the caste.

Though the Gond and Bhumia are extremely free in granting a divorce, they generally do not approve of loose living and adultery. The standard of sexual morality differs, however, from village to village. In villages where the elders are strict and severely punish offenders, adultery is rare, while in villages where the elders are more lenient, cases of adultery are more frequent.

Some years ago, a new house was built in one village. A Gond woman who worked as a help to the mason became rather friendly with him and was often seen chatting with him. Other workers noticed it and warned the woman. The caste elders fined both man and woman and demanded a caste dinner though nothing wrong could be proved against the mason and his help. The caste elders declared that the two were punished not because they had committed a crime, but in order to check them in time and to prevent a scandal.

At another village, two Bhumia friends went with their wives to Assam to work there in the tea-gardens. When war



broke out, one of the men joined up. Far from home, he found it impossible to send his wife back to her own relatives. He asked his friend to take her into his house and to look after her. His friend obliged him, but to such an extent that he treated the woman as his second wife. When the soldier returned from service, he heard what had happened. When his friend came to return the woman to him, the soldier refused to take her back. Now the friend, too, refused to keep her as his second wife and the woman found herself suddenly without any husband. The women of the village remarked: 'Serves her right. *Bhagwan* has punished her because she has sinned.'

### *Illegitimate Children*

If an unmarried woman gives birth to a child, mother and child are put out of caste. The mother can be readmitted only after she has disclosed the name of the child's father. If she refuses to name the father—which she usually does if he is a low-caste man—and if no other man comes forward to father the child and marry the woman, mother and child are permanently made outcastes without further chance of readmittance. Such a child cannot get married when grown up; it must look for a mate sharing the same fate or must marry into a low caste.

There is no stain on illegitimate birth as such. The child is treated as an outcaste only because its father's caste is unknown. It is without honour, because it is without caste. Were it not for the mother's stubborn refusal to reveal the name of its father, the child would have a father and belong to a certain caste.

A child conceived in adultery is considered as the child of the legal father though its natural father may be known. Such a child is not treated as illegitimate, though its mother may have been made an outcaste when she was caught in adultery. But upon the birth of the child, the woman and the child are readmitted into the caste, after payment of a fine and the performance of the purification ceremony. The expenses of this readmission are paid by the legal husband of the woman.

(c) *Other Offences*

*Breach of the Rules of Menstruation.* A menstruating woman has to observe certain rules of avoidance. She may not touch a waterpot or go near the hearth. If she does, the pot or hearth touched by her must be thrown away. But there is no other punishment.

If a man were to accept food or water from a woman during menstruation, the caste council would not punish him; but it is believed that *Bhagwan* himself or one of the minor gods would punish him. It is believed that a snake would bite him or a tiger kill him. This punishment would also follow if the man was unaware of the state of the menstruating woman from whom he accepted water or food. The woman herself would not be punished.

A man who beats a menstruating woman is fined five rupees by the caste council. He is not made an outcaste. My informant, the Bhumia Musra of Bijora, said that this was a new rule; in his father's time no fine at all was imposed for beating a menstruating woman.

*Tearing the Ear-Lobe.* The Gond outcast women who tear their ear-lobes by inserting too large an ornament (*tarki*). It is not known why such an accident is punished so severely.

The Bhumia around Dindori are more lenient; they do not punish a woman who has the misfortune to tear her ear-lobe.

*Getting Maggots in Wounds.* If maggots appear in the festering wound of a Bhumia or Gond, the patient is made an outcaste. It is believed that such a person at some time had sinned against *Bhagwan* himself. My informant, Musra, was of the opinion that *Bhagwan* sends this kind of disease if a man covets a woman whom he may not marry. Others regard it as a punishment for incest, in this or in a former life.

The Bhumia admit the patient for purification a month or a year after the wound has healed. The family of the patient has to entertain a number of caste fellows and give them a dinner with dishes of goats' meat, *urda* cakes, wheat breads and *kodai* gruel. The master of ceremonies (*sonwani*), usually a *nat* relative, receives five rupees for his service. Liquor



worth ten rupees must be provided for the diners.

The Gond demand a dinner which must consume at least 25 pounds of *kodai* or rice, with lentils, salt, and spices sufficient for such a meal. In addition to this, liquor worth one rupee four annas, a goat, and wheat cakes (*puri*) must be served to the diners.

*Theft.* My Bhumia informants could not recall a single case of theft committed by a caste fellow of theirs in their village. They remembered that some years ago a theft actually had occurred; a thief came at night and cut *kodo* in a field. But they believed that the thief belonged to another village. His identity was never discovered. If the thief had been a man of the village, he would have been found out. The villagers know fairly well how much each man in the village has harvested or earned as a field servant. Only he who had grain in excess could have stolen it.

If a Bhumia or Gond is found guilty of theft, he is punished by the village council. People in whose house the theft was committed would be allowed to give him a beating, or the village council would fine him from five to twelve rupees. With the money they would buy liquor and all would drink together. No report would be made to the police. If the police heard of the theft and arrested the thief, he would be made an outcaste, not for the theft, but for going to jail.

Recently, a theft was committed by two Bhumia in some village. The thieves, two young men, stole some ten *kuru* of rice and seven *kuru* of wheat from a house. They carried the grain away under the cover of darkness in the night, but did not notice that on their way they dropped some grain. Next morning, the theft was discovered and the thieves traced by the grain they had dropped. The village council fined the culprits ten rupees and forced them to leave the village. The police were not informed.

*Going to Jail.* When a Bhumia or Gond has been arrested for some crime, the caste council takes no action. But when he returns from jail, whether guilty or not, he is made an outcaste. The reason for his excommunication is not the

crime, whatever that may have been, but the fact that he had to accept food and drink from the hand of men not belonging to his caste. The caste council will impose a fine of about Rs. 25, and spend the money on drinks and in the purchase of a goat to be eaten at the purificatory banquet. According to other informants, two dinners have to be given for each of which a goat must be killed.

The same fine is imposed when a man returns from work in the tea-gardens of Assam.

### *Assault and Battery*

(a) *Among the Bhumia.* If a Bhumia is beaten by a low-caste man, a Panka, Kol, Chamar, Domar or Pardhan, he is made an outcaste.

If he is beaten by a Gond, he is made an outcaste in some places, but not everywhere. In villages where the Gond insist on a strict separation from the Bhumia, the latter retaliate by making an outcaste of a caste fellow who is beaten by a Gond. Where the Gond still regard the Bhumia as their social equals, no such action is taken.

A Bhumia who is beaten by a caste fellow, is not made an outcaste. He may, however, demand punishment of the offender. At a village called Nunkhan, a Bhumia was beaten by a caste fellow who inflicted a deep wound on his leg. The assaulted man made a report to the police, but the case was ultimately settled out of court by a fine of seven rupees which the offender paid to his victim.

If a Bhumia is beaten with a shoe, either by a caste fellow or an outsider, he is made an outcaste. However, the expenses for his readmission into the caste must be borne by the assailant. If that man refuses to pay, he is sued for the amount of money spent on the purification ceremony. According to one informant, the Bhumia refuse to accept money from the assailant if he is a low-caste man. They would feel, they say, as if they had taken food from his hand.

A Bhumia is not made an outcaste if he is beaten by a woman.

A Bhumia may with impunity assault and beat a man, even a low-caste man. The caste council takes no cognizance of



such a case even if the assaulted man later dies of his wounds. Murder is not punishable by the caste community. A murderer is, however, made an outcaste as soon as he is caught by the police and arrested. When he returns from jail, he must undergo the purification ceremony, not because he has murdered somebody, but because he has been to jail.

(b) *Among the Gond.* If a Gond is beaten by a Bhumia, Ahir, Dhimar, Panka, Kol, Pardhan, Mehtar, Dhulia or Agaria, he is made an outcaste. The man who assaulted him must pay the costs of purification. If he refuses to pay, the matter is taken to court. Until the matter is settled in court, the victim must pay the expenses of the caste dinners and the fine.

If a Gond is beaten by a Brahmin or Thakur, he is not made an outcaste.

A Gond who assaults a fellow Gond, is punished by the village council. Whenever possible, the matter will be settled out of court and without the interference of the police. If a Gond commits a murder, he is not punished by the caste council.

With only slight modifications, the same rules which are prevalent among the Bhumia apply also to the Gond in matters of assault and battery.

#### *Punishment for Killing Sacred or Unclean Animals*

(i) *Among the Bhumia.* Bhumia do not regard the cow as a sacred animal. They find nothing wrong in yoking a cow to the plough. But they will not intentionally kill a cow or bullock; nor do they eat beef. If by some mischance and unintentionally a Bhumia kills a cow or bullock, no action is taken by the caste council of the village. But whoever kills cattle intentionally, although in the heat of excitement, would be made an outcaste. Such cases happen when, for instance, stray cattle get into a field and eat up the crop. The punishment for killing cattle is a fine and entertainment of all caste fellows in the village at a dinner.

When a cow or bullock dies in the cattle-shed, the Bhumia remove the body to a place outside the village. They are even

permitted to remove for a fee a body from the cattle-shed of a non-tribal. When the Bhumia remove the dead body of a cow or bullock, they must carry it on their backs; they are not permitted to drag it over the ground after the manner of the Chamars. When they abandon the body outside the village, they throw a few handfuls of mud on it and say: '*Le, Lakshmi, itni din hamko palan poshan kiyi, ab ham tumko chorh denge*' ('Take this mud, Lakshmi, you have nourished us so long, now we leave you'). In the fashion of the Hindus, the Bhumia call the cow Lakshmi, the goddess, or *gau-mata* (Mother Cow). Then they call the Chamar to skin the animal. A Bhumia is not allowed to accept any money for the skin from the Chamar. The body is then left to the dogs and vultures which finish it in a few days.

A Bhumia may also remove the body of a horse, cat or dog from his house and carry it to a place outside the village. Though the Bhumia are permitted to eat rats, mice, squirrels and such other creatures, they may not kill any cats or dogs, though they may kill other domestic animals for food, like pigs, fowls and goats.

No Bhumia is permitted to remove for a fee the body of a dog, cat or horse from the house of a non-tribal. This is the job of a Mehtar (sweeper). A Bhumia would lower himself to the level of a Mehtar if he accepted money for such a service.

Bhumia are not allowed to kill monkeys and to eat them. But they are not punished if they kill a monkey unintentionally. Bhumia do not eat the meat of a tiger, though they are permitted to kill it.

Contrary to non-tribal custom, the Bhumia are not prevented by their caste laws from killing crows. They often deliberately do so. But crows are very shrewd birds and it is not easy to trap them.

(ii) *Among the Gond.* It is certain that in former times the Gond had no qualms about the killing and eating of cattle. In villages less exposed to non-tribal influence, they still kill cattle and eat beef. At Junwani, for instance, a village about 50 miles south-east of Mandla, the Gond always



ate beef and pork and drank liquor, however much they were urged against it by their 'reformed' caste fellows of Mandla. The Gond leaders of this tract listened to a venerable old Gond whom they highly respected and who advised them to follow faithfully their old traditions. He said that their ancestors had seen nothing wrong in eating beef and pork and in drinking liquor. He saw no reason why they should now stop doing so. For some time, the reformed Gond refused to interdine and intermarry with the Gond of the Junwani area, but since more and more Gond have reverted in recent times to eating pork and even beef and to drinking liquor, they have again begun to interdine and intermarry with them.

Still, in the villages along the Narbada, obviously under the influence of Hindu pilgrims, the Gond are much stricter and treat beef-eaters as outcastes. Any man who kills a cow or bullock, even if by accident, would be made an outcaste. He would have to slaughter two goats at the purification ceremony (*sirni*), spend ten to twenty rupees on liquor or coarse sugar, and feed his caste fellows *urda* cakes (*barra*) and rice for three or four days. Even a poor man would have to entertain his caste fellows for two days.

If a horse or cow dies in the stable of a Gond, he carries the body with the help of neighbours and fellow villagers outside the village. The skinning of the animal the Gond leave to the Chamar or Agaria.

If a dog or cat dies in the house, a string is tied around the body of the animal and it is dragged outside. Earthen pots in the house are broken and thrown away as also cooked food; the house is cleaned and given a coating with cattle manure, but no caste dinner must be prepared.

The Gond of the former Rewa State, who were always more under Hindu influence, had long ago given up beef-eating. The Gond who left the former Rewa State and settled in Mandla District soon began to eat beef when they saw their caste fellows in Mandla eating it.

The Gond regard field rats, mice and squirrels as a delicacy. They do not eat rats and mice caught in the house. The squirrels they catch in traps.

Though the Gond may eat beef, they are not allowed to slaughter cattle. If a Gond kills a cow deliberately, because he wants to eat beef, or in a rage because the animal strayed into his field, he would be made an outcaste. But he usually gets off with a slight fine. Cattle which die in the stable are dragged outside and skinned by Chamar in villages where beef is taboo, by the Gond themselves where beef may be eaten. The skin is cut into long strips and used for tying the yoke to the shafts on plough and harrow. Such a rope can be used for three years. The meat is distributed among the beef-eating villagers.

In the villages where the Gond are allowed to eat beef, no Gond is made an outcaste for killing a horse, dog or cat. Their dead bodies are not regarded as polluting. In villages, however, where Hindu influence has resulted in prohibiting beef-eating, a Gond would not only be made an outcaste for eating cow's meat, but also for killing a horse, dog or cat. He would have to pay a fine for merely touching their dead bodies. Regulations vary from village to village. The more the Gond conform to Hindu usage and religion, the stricter they are in the observance of these taboo rules. They have to be strict, for on the observance of these rules depends their social prestige.

A Gond may not kill a monkey. If he kills a monkey by accident he is fined by the caste council.

Gond who do not belong to the tiger's clan are permitted to kill tigers. But they do not eat tiger's meat, though they use its fat as a medicine against rheumatism.

## 6. EXCOMMUNICATION OF A CULPRIT

### (a) *The Judgement*

If the offence against any tribal law is committed publicly or in such a manner as to leave no doubt and to allow for no mitigating circumstances, the culprit is made an outcaste automatically. No formal excommunication is required. If the guilt of a person under suspicion is not so evident, he may be called before the village or caste council for trial. If he refuses to appear before the *panchayat*, he may be tried



in his absence. Judges at the trial are the village or caste elders; the culprit's caste fellows or fellow villagers are the jury. They may also act as witnesses for the prosecution or for the defence. The aim of the judges is to bring about a confession. Once the guilt has been established, judgement is delivered according to tradition.

If a person under suspicion cannot be brought to confess his guilt, he may be compelled to take an oath (*kiriya*). This can be done either with Ganges water<sup>3</sup> or in the cow-shed. Among the Hinduised Gond, the use of Ganges water for this purpose is most effective. One or the other villager always has a vessel full of Ganges water. It is brought in a small pear-shaped brass vessel (*lota*) and placed before the accused. He has to lift the vessel over his head and say: 'May Ganges mother burn me if I tell a lie.'<sup>4</sup>

In the less Hinduised villages, the suspect is led into a cowshed. There a spot is cleaned and coated with fresh cattle manure. Then a vessel full of water is put on the spot. Into the water they pour salt, some bamboo splints, iron nails cut into small pieces, and some ends of the rope hinges of the door leading into the cattle shed. The suspect has to lift the vessel on his head and solemnly declare his innocence. Three times he is asked by the caste elders whether he has committed the crime of which he is accused. All the people watch him closely. If he lifts the pot on his head readily and without perturbation and declares his innocence in a firm voice, they believe him. But if he hesitates and shows some reluctance to take the oath, all urge him to make a confession rather than to perjure himself. For it is believed that *Ganga mai* would send him some dreadful punishment if he resorted to perjury. Not only he, but his children would have to suffer.

If the suspect takes the oath, he is declared innocent. Later on, it may be found that he indeed perjured himself. But

<sup>3</sup> The oath with water was practised already in Vedic times. *Varuna*, the god of the water, was also the god of the oath. Cf. H. Lueders (1951): p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> This form of oath-taking is common all over northern India [Cf. W. Crooke (1926): Vol. 2, p. 42.]

no further action is taken against the perjurer by the caste or village council. It is believed that *Ganga mai* would punish him more severely than any *panch* ever could.

A man who refuses to take the oath when the caste council demands it, is made an outcaste. He can only be reconciled if he takes the oath or confesses his guilt. If he confesses, the ordinary course of juridical procedure follows; if he denies the charge under oath, he is acquitted.

(b) *The Effects of Excommunication*

No member of the caste may eat, drink or associate with the outcaste. They may, though, smoke the earthen pipe (*chillam*) with him, not however the leaf pipe (*chungi*).

The outcaste may draw water from the village well, but his caste fellows may not drink water which he has drawn. An outcaste may not sleep in his own house, but only on the veranda. There he takes his meals and drinks. He should not touch anything that would be polluted by his touch, like pots and pans. He should not touch the grain bin, though he is allowed to go to the threshing floor (*kanihar*) and to work there. He may even sleep with his wife.

If an outcaste visits another village and there, without revealing his status, eats and drinks with a caste fellow, the latter is not automatically made an outcaste. Nevertheless, he is bound to give a dinner to four or five men of his *nat* relationship, to purify himself of the pollution contracted by eating or drinking with an outcaste. But if he eats and drinks with the outcaste in full knowledge of his guest's status, he too would be punished with excommunication. An outcaste posing as a normal member of the caste in a village not yet informed of his excommunication, would draw additional punishment upon himself by thus inconveniencing his hosts.

An outcaste too poor to bear the high expenses of the reconciliation may have to stay in this state for several years. In the end his caste fellows will relent and admit him at less cost.



## 7. CEREMONIES AT THE RECONCILIATION OF AN OUTCASTE

If, for some serious breach of the caste rules, a man or woman or a whole family, has been made outcaste, a council (*panch*) of the caste fellows of the village, or of several villages if the case may warrant it, is called to fix the exact punishment which the culprit deserves. Punishment usually consists of fines, the amount of which depends on the gravity of the offence.

The formal reconciliation (*sirni*) of the offender takes place on the day fixed by the caste council. Already, weeks before, the outcaste makes strenuous efforts to prepare everything for the big public dinners which he has to give to his caste fellows and to the village notables, for all the caste fellows of the village and many from other villages are invited to witness the ceremony of readmission into the caste. According to the seriousness of the offence, the outcaste must feed the whole crowd from one to six days. Some offenders remain outcastes for life because they cannot scrape together sufficient funds for the expensive banquets required for their reconciliation.

The master of ceremonies at such a reconciliation is called *sonwani* (from *sona*, gold and *pani*, water). Among non-tribals, the person put out of caste is purified by sprinkling on him water in which gold has been dipped. The man who sprinkles the water on the culprit is called *sonwani*. This master of ceremonies is a kind of temporary headman of the caste, appointed expressly for this particular case only. He has to see that every ceremony is correctly performed and according to regulations. This *sonwani* is almost always a *nat* relative of the culprit, i.e. a relative connected with the culprit through affinity, either the father or brother of the culprit's wife, or a husband or father-in-law of the culprit's sister. He is preferably an influential and highly respectable man. If the culprit is a woman, the *sonwani* should not be one of her own kinsmen, but should be chosen from another branch of her husband's affines.

On the day of reconciliation, before all guests arrive, the whole house of the outcaste is cleared of all its furniture,

except the grain bins. All earthen pots, baskets except the winnowing fans (*supa*), vessels and spoons made of bamboo or the shell of gourds, the mud structure of the hearth, must be thrown outside and may not be used again. All brass and iron vessels and cooking utensils must be washed, also all the clothes in the house. The inmates of the house must bathe.

The cleaning of the house is done by the *nat* relatives. The members of the outcaste's family do not even lend a helping hand. When the house is empty, the walls inside and outside are given a fresh coating with cattle manure and white clay diluted in water. A new hearth is set up at the fireplace. The new hearth was moulded by the inmates of the house a few days previous to the cleaning. Then a fire is kindled and a pot full of *kodai* must be boiled on the new hearth.

Meanwhile, the other people who have now assembled at the house take the outcaste to a near river or pond (*nala*). All the way the villagers and *nat* relatives abuse him and throw pieces of cow-dung and mud at him. They chase him up-river and back again. Then they make the outcaste sit on a boulder or stone in the middle of the river. There the master of ceremonies himself cuts with a knife or razor the hair of the culprit at four spots on the forehead, at the neck, and at the temples. If the outcaste does not want to have his head shaved entirely—a ceremony regarded as particularly degrading—he has to pay one and a quarter rupee to the *sonwani*. But if the offence of the outcaste has been very serious, his whole body must be shaved, even his scalp-lock and the hair under his armpits. A woman also is shaved in the same manner by the *sonwani*. After that he pares the outcaste's toe- and finger-nails.

Next, the people chase the outcaste into the river, sprinkle water over him and bathe him. If the outcaste is a woman, the bathing is carried out by women. After the bath, a goat or fowl is killed at the riverside. If the culprit's offence has been serious, for instance adultery, he (or she) is offered a cup of the victim's blood mixed with the urine of the *sonwani*. Sometimes the bath follows the drinking of the blood. Then the outcaste is dressed in new clothes. All this takes place in full view of the whole assembled crowd. People of all



castes are present. After dressing, the culprit goes to each person present and makes obeisance before him, also before members of other castes. Then, catching his right ear, he must bow five times or squat on the ground and get up again as many times.

While all this takes place, the goat just killed is cut up and the meat put into the cooking pots. Cakes of wheat, *urda* and rice flour are baked over an open fire, rice and lentils are cooked in huge pots. When everything is ready, the people present are requested to sit down in rows and in separate groups according to their caste. People of a different caste get grain and raw meat and may prepare their meal themselves. When all are seated, some men busy themselves with distributing leaf plates to the diners. They have been prepared by a number of women in the *nat* relationship. The *kodai* or rice is served with the meat of fowls or with goats' meat. Clarified butter, sugar, coconuts, sweets, tobacco, arecanuts, cigars and liquor are likewise handed out to the diners.

Before the dinner begins, the outcaste must place a certain sum of money, previously fixed by the caste council, on the plate of the master of ceremonies. This sum is meant as compensation, for the master of ceremonies is made an outcaste for eating from the same plate with the culprit. With the money he has to buy himself back into the caste. It is only just that the culprit should pay for his readmission into the caste community.

First, the *sonwani* must begin to eat with the outcaste, then the others also eat though they still sit at some distance from the two. After the dinner all return to the house. At the gate leading into the courtyard the men stop and sit down. Now another goat is killed. At the same time the women, who after the cleaning of the house cooked rice on the new hearth, bring it outside to the people sitting at the gate. Another meal is taken in which rice is served with goats' meat. However, the main portion of the meat of the goat just killed is preserved for another dinner on the following day.

Sometimes, when the offence of the culprit is particularly serious, such banquets (*sirni*) must be given to all the guests for five or six consecutive days. Each meal consists of goat's

or fowl's meat, or rice and of a dish of flat *urda* cakes (*barra*). Sometimes a banquet must also be given in other villages. A man who has killed a cow or seduced a low caste woman has to give several banquets in his own village and at least in one neighbouring village.

The master of ceremonies has not only the task of reinstating the outcaste, he must also stand security for his client's good behaviour in the future. He is very anxious to observe all regulations and ceremonies to the letter, for if he makes any mistake he may himself be made an outcaste. Of course, he is technically put out of caste for eating with the culprit, but is soon cleansed from this pollution by giving at his home a dinner to a selected few. If the *sonwani* shows any partiality towards his client or admits any irregularity, it may happen that the caste elders protest and call the whole feast off. They postpone the purification ceremony till the dispute about the right procedure in the case is settled to the general satisfaction. In such a case, the *sonwani*, too, stays an outcaste. However, any expenses which are incurred in such a complication of the case must be borne by the culprit as the excommunication causes the *sonwani* a lot of inconvenience.

Sometimes an outcaste finds it difficult to secure the services of a master of ceremonies for his reconciliation. In such a case the culprit must offer more than the usual reward, a cow or a bullock, or a daughter or sister in marriage. This happened some years ago in a village near Bhirsingpur. A man who had been made an outcaste was compelled to offer his daughter in marriage to the man who was prepared to act as his master of ceremonies. Since the girl was only eight years of age when the promise was made, the man had to wait for the marriage till the girl became mature. It was some three years later that the marriage took place. When the girl saw that the man was already advanced in years, with a wife and several sons and daughters older than herself, she refused to marry him. But as the man insisted on the promise being carried out, her brothers compelled her to go through the wedding with the man. The girl's father, meanwhile, had died, but the brothers were held responsible by the *sonwani* who stubbornly refused to release the girl from her engage-



ment and threatened the whole family with excommunication.

As was to be expected, the girl ran away the day after her wedding and returned to her brothers. They sent her back to her husband. After a few days she ran away again. When the man found that the girl would not stay in his house, he brought the matter before the caste council of his village. Though the girl's relatives pleaded that the man was much too old for the girl, the caste elders decided that he was the girl's lawful husband as her father had promised her to his *sonwani*. To enforce their decision, they threatened to excommunicate her brothers if they kept her at home. The girl consequently was again sent back to her aged husband. After some time she found a boy who was willing to offer her his protection. She eloped with him. Her brothers were now compelled to pay compensation to her former husband. He had to accept it, for though the brothers had no right to keep the girl at home, she herself was free to run away and to choose another husband if she so wanted. Compensation had to be paid, but no caste council could force the girl to stay with her first husband if she did not want to.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

#### 1. THE VILLAGE

THE POLITICAL unit of a village in eastern Mandla consists of two to ten hamlets, called *tola* or *basti*, more or less distant from one another according to the formation of the terrain and the lay-out of the fields allotted for cultivation. The houses are built in what is called the *abadi* (lit. populousness) area, the space set apart for building purposes, and distinct from the area for cultivation.

The village as a political unit generally includes settlers of different tribes or castes. They may live by themselves in separate hamlets, or attach themselves to a particular caste group. Apart from Dindori and other market places, the main village population of eastern Mandla consists of Gond (who nearly always provide the village headman), Bhumia, Panka, and a sprinkling of other castes like Agaria, Kol, Dhulia, Pardhan and Jogi.

The Bhumia generally live in separate hamlets at some distance from the Gond and other castes. The Gond, as the leading community, are less exclusive and allow members of other castes to settle in their hamlets. But each caste group has the tendency of forming a hamlet of its own.

The lay-out of a Gond or Bhumia hamlet depends much on the particular formation of the terrain. Often a hamlet is perched on the top of a steep hill, or hidden away on the decline of a small valley, never near to a populous market-place or a much-frequented public road. A hamlet consists of a loose cluster of homesteads, interspersed with vegetable patches surrounded by hedges, and narrow paths winding down to a river or pond.

Due to the preference of tribal people for building their hamlets well away from open places, on hills or in hidden



valleys, it is quite frequently a problem to find a convenient waterplace. The women have often to walk a long distance for water. At Dullopur, for instance, the well is far from the Bhumia *tola*. The Bhumia started some time ago to dig a well of their own, but when they came to rock, they gave it up. At Bhagdu, the women fetch their water from a well two miles away. At Junwani, the well dries up in the hot season; whoever comes late in the morning gets no water and must go to the river which is over a mile away. At another village one can see in the hot season the women hurrying to a spring (*jhiria*) one and a half miles distant. Whoever comes late has to walk a further three miles to the river.

The size of the hamlets varies from ten to twenty homesteads. They are built as separate units on any site large enough to allow the erection of several huts at the same level. Whenever possible, a terrain with gravel soil is selected because it is more easily kept dry and clean during the monsoon.

Inhabitants of a hamlet usually belong to one or two kinship groups, but each family maintains a separate establishment. Members of a joint family build their huts around a common courtyard. It is said that in former times the Bhumia, and to a certain extent also the Gond, lived in more compact settlements. At some places in the interior, in the Baiga Chak for instance, this old settlement form is still prevalent. There the Bhumia of a hamlet have their homesteads built in three compact rows which form three sides of a huge square. One side is open where the road enters the hamlet. The huts are built adjoining each other; there is not even sufficient space for a garden at the back of the house. These closed settlements are better able to protect man and beast against the numerous wild animals of the jungle. Tigers and panthers might attack a solitary farmstead, but rarely enter a closed settlement. During the harvest, however, most farmers anyway live in temporary shelters on their fields, but their cattle and other domestic animals are kept in the hamlet, securely locked up in the stable.

Gond and Bhumia seem to feel no special attachment to any particular village. They easily abandon an unsuitable village

site and settle at some other place. If they are given a chance to clear virgin jungle farther away, they gladly leave their present habitat and settle, men, women and children, near the place given to them for clearing cultivation. They are always eager to return to slash-and-burn cultivation, because for this particular form of cultivation no bullocks are required for at least three years.

If the old village is not too far from the new fields, the cultivators retain their old houses till the new area is sufficiently cleared to allow the building of permanent homesteads. But if the distance to the new fields is too great to return daily to the old village, the cultivators select a clearing in the jungle and there build temporary shelters (*jhala*). Later, these shelters can easily be shifted to a more convenient site.

In old times, Gond and Bhunia had scarcely any permanent villages. Their peculiar form of shifting cultivation made a frequent change of their habitats imperative, since after three years of cultivation the fields had to be abandoned for a new jungle. Naturally, people wanted to live near their fields and merely changed the village site, returning to it again after some years.

Gond and Bhunia change their village sites for other reasons too. If many children die at one place, they look for a healthier spot somewhere else. After an epidemic they usually desert their hamlet and occupy a new site. Or if they find that a place is too muddy in the monsoon or too far from water in the dry season, they also shift their huts to a more convenient place. However, they rarely leave altogether and settle at a great distance from their former home.

Gond and Bhunia do not seem to have a particular preference for the sunny side of a hill on which to build a new village. Many villages are found on the northern slopes of hills.

At present, since shifting cultivation has been stopped almost everywhere, the change of village sites is no longer so frequent as it used to be. Nor does the Revenue or Forest Departments permit such a change except for grave reasons.

A new village is properly established when the villagers



decide to perform the annual sowing ceremony, the *bidri*, in their new village. For this offering they invite the village priest (*dewar*) of their old village, or a relative of his who has come to settle in the new village. Sometimes the *dewar* of a neighbouring village is called to perform the *bidri* rite. But if this is not practicable, a man of the new settlers is appointed as official village priest.

Another village patron, *Thakur deo*, must also be found. A magician (*gunia*) is called to find the tree in the village area where the village god might be pleased to take up his new abode. What *Thakur deo* is for the Bhumia, *Bara deo* is for the Gond. When a place (*than*) has been found for these main gods of the Bhumia (resp. Gond), places of worship are arranged also for the minor deities.

In the hamlet of the village headman there is always a hut reserved for visitors and petty touring officials where they may stay for the night. It is the task of the headman to see that such houses (*chhatti*) are built and repaired by the combined labour of the new settlers. The repair and occasional cleaning of this unpretentious resthouse is the task of the village watchman (*kotwar*), who may request the assistance of the other villagers in turn for this work. It is repaired and cleaned when the arrival of an official is announced for the night. At other times it is generally in a state of disrepair and does not look very inviting.

At some distance, west or south of each hamlet, is the burial ground, easily discernible by irregularly placed heaps of boulders and broken cots and earthen pots (*ghara*) lying about the graves. On any side of the village, near a rivulet or stream, which often dries up in the hot season, is the burning place, the so-called *mar-ghat*.

In the hamlet of the village headman, near his house, there is always on a free protected spot under a leafy tree a raised platform of mud and stones, the so-called *chabutra*, where the villagers meet for discussion of village affairs and where the headman receives his visitors.

In village life it is usually the Gond who take the lead; they are more forward and self-assured. The Bhumia follow and imitate them. While the Gond provide the headman of the

village, the Bhumia supply the village priest and often also the sooth-sayer (*gunia*). The village watchman is usually a Panka.

In each village, a few Panka families are also found, one or two Ahir families, a few Dhimar, an Agaria, and here and there a stray member of the non-tribal castes, for in the villages of eastern Mandla the traditional division of labour is still more prevalent than in the non-tribal villages of the plains. Certain tribes and castes are required for particular services in the village. Gond and Bhumia farmers, for instance, do not graze their own cattle except bullocks, this being done by the Ahir. All iron tools and implements of the Gond and Bhumia are supplied and repaired by the Agaria. The Dhimar (fisherman) supplies the grinding stones, the Dhulia baskets and music, and the Panka weave the unbleached cloth which men and women wear. In some villages we find a Chamar (cobbler) who makes the leather-straps (*nari*) by which the yoke is tied to the plough or harrow, and sandals or shoes.

## 2. VILLAGE OFFICIALS

### (a) *The Village Headman*

In land rented out by the Government to permanent tenants (*ryotwari*), and in forest areas, the village headman is called *patel*, in *malguzari* villages (land owned by private persons and rented out to tenants) *mukaddam* (lit. leader), since here he is only the agent of the landowner who is the real village headman responsible to the Government.

The village headman is nominated for life by the Revenue Department of the district in *ryotwari* villages, by the Forest Department in forest areas and by the landlord in *malguzari* villages. A landlord cannot depose a headman once appointed without the consent of the deputy commissioner (head of a district). When a new headman is to be appointed, the villagers are usually consulted.

The headman of a village is generally a fairly wealthy man, commanding the respect of the villagers and intelligent enough



to prove himself useful to the officials when they inspect the village.

It is the task of the village headman to superintend the village, to see to order and peace in the village, to preside at village councils and meetings, and to collect the land revenue from the villagers. If the headman is directly responsible to the Revenue or Forest Departments, he hands the land revenue over to the respective Government officials; if he is only the agent of a landlord, he gives the annual rent to the landlord who in turn pays his dues to the Government. When higher officials of the Revenue, Police or Excise Departments come for inspection, the headman has to assist them, show them his registers and report to them everything of importance.

The village headman does not get much remuneration for his service: usually only a small share, a sixteenth or eighth part of the land revenue of the village, and an extra field for free cultivation. But this small additional income, together with the customary free labour (*begar*) which he can demand from the villagers, makes all the difference between comparative affluence and penury. Even a poor man will slowly improve his economic status after he has been headman of the village for a few years.

A village headman has by custom to provide meals for the officials who visit the village for inspection. Though the officials are advised to pay for everything they receive, few headmen dare ask for payment.

Some villages are without a headman. In such villages, the farmers take turns in providing meals for the touring officials: wheat flour, or rice, a fowl, or whatever else is required. This contribution is called *kurag*. The villagers are supposed to get paid for their provision, but as a rule they get nothing, nor would they accept anything if it were offered to them. But since, in return for free meals, the villagers expect some favours from the officials whom they entertain, it is really the Government which suffers by this system.

Usually the village headman is a Gond; rarely is a Bhumia or Panka ever appointed. Though he may have the necessary qualifications, a Bhumia or Panka headman would find it

difficult to lead a village where Gond are in a majority. They do not want to be led by a member of an inferior caste.

Though we cannot say that the office of village headmanship is hereditary, it is usually the heir of a deceased headman who succeeds him in office. But if for some reason—incompetence, sickness or unwillingness of the former headman's heir to take over the office—another man is to be chosen, the landlord or deputy commissioner of the district appoints the new headman after consulting the villagers.

### (b) *The Village Watchman*

The Government has placed in every village a watchman who also acts as a messenger. He is called *kotwar*, which means 'guardian of the wall'. The *kotwar* is usually a Panka by caste, in rare cases a Gond, and only exceptionally a Bhumia. The reason why this post is usually filled by a Panka is that in most villages of Central India and the Deccan the *kotwar* has also to remove dead cattle from the village precincts and to skin them. In the villages of eastern Mandla this job is done by Chamars, but this may be a recent innovation.

It is the main duty of the village watchman to report weekly or bi-weekly to the police anything unusual that may happen in the village, every birth, case of disease or death, the visit of foreigners and strangers, any theft, murder or other crime. He has also to see that the name of any stranger who stays in the village overnight is entered in the register.

Another important duty of the village watchman is to render every possible assistance to Government officials visiting the village. The *kotwar* has to see to it that the village guest-house (*chhatti*) is cleaned when an official is announced; he has to act as his messenger and to summon the persons wanted; on his departure, he has to accompany the official to the boundary of his village where the *kotwar* of the neighbouring village assumes responsibility.

The village watchman is responsible for the annual clearing of village boundaries. He has to organize the villagers for the work of clearing the boundaries of bushes and shrubs.

The village watchman should not possess any field, or only a small one, lest he neglect his duties as watchman. For his



living he receives a yearly remuneration of four *kuru* of grain (*brit*) for every plough of land. A 'plough' is the area of land which can be ploughed in a day. It is the duty of the field surveyor (*patwari*) to assess the number of ploughs of each landowner or tenant. Big landowners usually try to bribe the field surveyor to reduce the number of their ploughs, while owners of small plots are often charged more than the correct tax. The *kotwar* usually is too prudent to appeal against this arrangement; he would not get his due in any case, but make enemies of persons on whom he so much depends.

Daily labourers (*banihar*) who do not own any land give two *kuru* of grain. If they have no grain, they pay the equivalent in cash (from eight annas to a rupee; in former times, four annas). In addition to this, the *kotwar* has a right to demand from every wheat-growing cultivator two *kuru* of wheat. This contribution is called *unhari*.

In former times, the village watchman received once a year two annas in cash from every villager to buy himself a new red turban (*pagri*) and a coat. But this contribution has now been stopped.

The office of village watchman is generally hereditary, the eldest son following his father in office if the latter retires or dies. It is only for grave reasons that the heir of a deceased village watchman is superseded and a new *kotwar* appointed.

### (c) *The Village Priest*

In eastern Mandla and beyond, it is always a Bhumia who acts as the official village priest. He is called *dewar* (priest). The Gond also call him *dharti ka malak* (lord of the soil). In the tracts where the Bhumia are less numerous, a member of another Baiga sub-caste may take his place. For this reason the village priest is often simply called 'Baiga'. In eastern Mandla, the Bhumia, as the traditional village priests, are generally also addressed as *dewar*, even if they do not act as village priests. The title of their most important vocation has thus become their caste name.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The custom of employing members of a certain aboriginal tribe as village priests, even in villages with a purely non-tribal population, is

It is the task of the village priest to perform the rites of worship and supplication which are offered to the gods in the name and for the welfare of the whole village. Often he is also invited to function as priest on other occasions, at festivals, weddings and funeral feasts. It is he who performs the sacrifice on the threshing floor after the crop has been harvested; he is usually invited to act as master of ceremonies at the solemn pig sacrifice (*laru kaj*), and he performs the exorcism of a man-eating tiger. His main task is to perform the annual sowing ceremony (*bidri*) at the beginning of the monsoon when the sowing season starts. It is always a member of the Baiga caste who has to perform this solemn sacrifice in honour of *Thakur deo*, the main village god. Even in villages with no Baiga population, a Baiga is invited on this occasion to function as their priest. He is the official village priest, and his position cannot be taken by another man, even were he of the same caste. When the official village priest is unable to function at the *bidri*-sowing ceremony, because he is sick or otherwise incapacitated, the villagers allow his wife to perform the ceremony in his name rather than take another man as a substitute. For other offerings and sacrifices, another member of the caste may function in place of the official priest, but not when the *bidri* ceremony is performed.

When a village community decides to abandon a village and to settle at another place, the village priest automatically becomes priest of the new village. But if only a part of the community leaves the village to establish a new settlement, the *dewar* of the old village usually stays at the old village, but comes to perform the *bidri* ceremony at the new site also. However, if the newly-founded village is too far away, the new settlers invite the village-priest of a neighbouring village to act as their priest, or they choose a new village priest from among their own group, preferably a close relative of their former *dewar*. They will not start a new village without having arranged for a priest to perform the official sacrifices.

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widespread in central and north-eastern India. In Mirzapur District of Uttar Pradesh, for instance, it is a member of the Chero tribe who acts as village priest, sorcerer and magician, diviner and fortune-teller. Cf. K. S. Mathur (1952-53): p. 116.



If need be, even the widow of a *dewar* may perform the sacrifice though ordinarily women are incapable of acting as priests.

The village priest receives from every family of the village an annual remuneration (*kanihari*) of one to three litres (*seer*) of every kind of grain harvested. Each villager gives at his discretion. The *dewar* visits after the harvest every house of the village and receives his due on a winnowing fan. Some villagers give more maize, others more rice or *kodai*, but usually they give a portion of every kind of grain.

The office of the village priest is hereditary and passes from father to eldest son. If a priest has no son, a brother, nephew or another relative becomes his successor. If the *dewar* has no heir, the villagers elect another man for this office. Meanwhile, the priest's widow may perform the worship.

A village priest remains a priest for life. But if for some unlawful action he is excommunicated by the caste council, for instance for marrying a woman of a different caste, he cannot perform the *bidri* ceremony until he is reconciled to his community.

Ordinarily a village priest can scarcely be distinguished from the other men of his caste. He is neither wealthier nor poorer than his caste fellows, enjoys no special privileges, nor are any special taboos imposed on him. At social or religious celebrations only does he enjoy some social prestige; and he is generally invited to perform or to direct the ceremonies even when they are not his prerogative. Even members of higher castes may invite him to perform the religious rites for them at such celebrations. But when the feast is over, the *dewar* returns to the normal life of *Bhumia* in the village.

### 3. VILLAGE SERVANTS

#### (a) *The Ahir*

The herdsman of the farmers of eastern Mandla is nearly always an Ahir by caste.<sup>2</sup> He likes to be addressed as *patel* (village headman).

<sup>2</sup> According to Russell and Hiralal (1916: Vol. 2, p. 19) the Ahir or 'Abhiras' appear to have been one of the immigrant tribes from Central Asia who entered India shortly before or about the commencement of

Contrary to custom in the non-tribal villages, where he gets paid for each bullock or bull, the grazier of eastern Mandla receives a nominal remuneration only for the grazing of bulls and bullocks. At harvest time only, when the farmers have brought in their crops and are threshing out the grain, the Ahir makes the rounds and asks each farmer for a winnowing fan full of grain. This annual gift is known as *kanihar*. It is not a fixed measure; each farmer gives as much as he can spare and of any kind of grain he likes.

For the grazing of cows, however, the Ahir receives a more adequate remuneration. Once a year at harvest time he is paid five *kuru* (25 seers or litres) of grain for each cow or, if he so prefers, he gets a handful of grain (*bhari*) daily and in addition two and a half *kuru* of grain at harvest time. The Ahir must come himself every day to collect his due.

It is also his task—again contrary to non-tribal custom—to milk the cows of the whole village. For this job he is entitled to a certain share in the milk. This share is known as *barwai* (price for service). If a farmer has two milk cows, the Ahir keeps every third day's milk of one cow for himself. If the farmer has only one milk cow, the Ahir milks three days for the owner, and then one day for himself. If the owner of the cow needs all the milk for his own requirements, he pays the Ahir half a rupee at *Diwari* (day of the cattle feast, in October) or gives him a piece of cloth of equal value.

In addition to this, the Ahir also gets a measure of grain after the garnering of the winter crop. It is left to the discretion of the farmers how much grain they pour on the Ahir's winnowing fan.

When a cow has calved in the field, the Ahir receives a few annas for carrying home the calf. For a female buffalo calf he receives a rupee and not infrequently a meal. It is his

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the Christian era... Owing apparently to the fact that the Abhiras, like the Gujars, devoted themselves to a pastoral mode of life in India, whereas the previous Aryan immigrants had settled down to cultivation, they gave their name to the great occupational caste of herdsmen which was subsequently developed, and of which they may originally have constituted the nucleus.'



job to clean the calf and to take special care of it during its first days of life.

The fact that the Ahir is paid according to the number of heads of cows and not of bulls or bullocks, which he takes out for grazing, indicates in my opinion that in eastern Mandla cattle were originally kept mainly for milk, not for field work. The non-tribal farmers of the plains, on the other hand, value cattle for their work and, accordingly, pay the grazier for grazing their bullocks, not for grazing their cows. Of course, they pay him for the grazing of their buffalo cows as these are their main milk animals.

In addition to his occupational duties, it is usually the village grazier's task to prepare the guesthouse for Government officials and other visitors of the village, to fetch grass for their animals, water for their cook and to clean the cooking pots after meals, for the Ahir belongs to a caste from whom even Brahmins may accept food and water.

#### (b) *The Agaria*

The Agaria, of a caste of semi-aboriginal iron-smelters and smiths in Central India and Bihar, gets five *kuru* of grain from every plough of land. Moreover, he also receives two and a half *kuru* of wheat from every wheat-growing farmer of the village after the harvest of the winter crop.

In addition to this annual remuneration which he receives from every farmer regardless of the service he renders them during the year, he gets five *kuru* of grain for sharpening the blade of the harrow (*bakhar*). This tax is paid but once as long as the blade lasts—two or three years—and the Agaria has to sharpen it as often as necessary. When a farmer buys a new blade, he must pay the Agaria again five *kuru* of grain when he brings the blade for the first time for sharpening.

The village smith also gets a winnowing fan full of grain at harvest time from each farm labourer, and one or at least half a *kuru* of grain from each farmer for sharpening the sickles. The Agaria never forgets to ask for his dues—a welcome contribution to his grain bin. Each cultivator gives him some grain also at the harvest of the winter crop, though this time only about a quarter *kuru* (two *barhia*).

(c) *The Dhulia*

Every aboriginal village of eastern Mandla employs a musician who usually belongs to the caste of Dhulia.<sup>3</sup> The village musician receives his fee on the occasion of a wedding or funeral feast, or whenever else his services are required. For a wedding, several musicians come together. They are paid altogether from ten to twenty rupees and get free meals as long as the celebration lasts. For playing at a funeral feast the musicians receive only two rupees and one meal a day.

The Dhulia are semi-aboriginal musicians who beat the drums and dance at weddings. When off duty, they make baskets and mats, or work as field labourers.

(d) *The Pardhan*

The Pardhan or Pathari, as they are called in the villages near Dindori, belong to a caste of minstrels, bards and genealogists. They cannot exactly be called village servants; they serve a clan. A Pardhan of the clan Kusro, for instance, only serves Kusro clansmen among the Gond.

It is believed that the Pardhan are of Gond origin, but for some reason they got separated from the tribe. Today they are treated as outcastes. The village headman of Junwani told me the following story about the origin of the Pardhan: Once there was a mother who had four sons. The youngest asked: 'Who will honour me? There is no one to honour me.' The other brothers now made the agreement that their youngest brother would be honoured as soon as one of them died. Since that time the Gond give presents to the Pardhan, the descendants of that youngest brother, whenever some member of the family dies. But that youngest brother was made an outcaste because he made himself a fiddle and covered it with the skin of a cow. Naturally also his descendants, the Pardhan, are outcaste. In fact, the Gond do not intermarry nor even interdine with the Pardhan.

<sup>3</sup> The name Dhulia derives from *dholi*, a drum. Dhulia is the term used in the Maratha Districts; in Central India the caste is called Basor, the name being a corruption of Bansphor, 'breaker of bamboos', a name indicative of their main profession. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, p. 208.



The office of the Pardhan as bard or genealogist is hereditary; the son inherits his clientele from his father. If there are several sons, they divide the Gond families, whom their father served, among themselves. It is the Pardhan's duty to visit the families in his charge once a year (at Bijora) or at least once in three years (as at Junwani), usually in the month of *Magh* (January), and to recite to them the whole history of the Gond race and in particular that of their clan. It usually takes him the whole night. The Pardhan recites from memory. He is supposed to know the history of their clan (*kur*) and *garh* (*kher*) by heart, as well as the history of each individual family. Few Pardhan are literate. After his recitation, he is entertained by his clients with a hearty meal of rice and pulse, goats' meat or chicken, and liquor. He also receives a money present. Then a bed is prepared for him on the veranda (*parchhi*) since he is not allowed to enter a Gond house. In the morning, he drinks his rice gruel (*pej*) and before he takes his leave, he enters into his register, if he knows to write, the names of the children born since his last visit, and also the names of the newly-married couples. If he is illiterate, he learns the names by heart. For each girl of the clan that got married he receives a rupee. Usually he must visit her husband several times before the fee is paid. This money is called *bhaja dan* or *burha dan* (after that the woman may grow as old as she may, she has nothing more to pay!).

After the death of a member of the clan the Pardhan comes and demands his due: '*Hamara dastur lao*'. The heirs of the deceased give him some articles of the deceased's possessions: a big brass plate (*thali*), a small brass pot (*lota*), his axe, his sickle, a loincloth, a shirt (*anga*), a scarf or turban, and the ornaments of one ear, arm and leg. Even if the deceased wore golden ear-rings, one is given to the Pardhan. While poor people do not give a big money present, wealthy Gond are supposed to pay at least two or three rupees. They may even give a calf, a bullock or a horse to the Pardhan.

These dues are generally paid when the Pardhan comes on his regular visit once a year or once in two years. If nobody in a family has died since his last visit, he gets a rupee; if

he comes regularly every year, he gets only about four annas. But there are few families which do not mourn for a dead relative; sometimes the Pardhan needs a horse or bullock to carry off his presents.

Contrary to non-tribal custom, the Gond do not seem to require the Pardhan's advice in order to avoid prohibitive degrees of relationship when a boy and girl are about to marry. The Gond themselves know well enough whom they may marry and whom not. Their marriage taboos are, moreover, not so severe as those of the non-tribals.

It seems that, while each clan of the Gond has a Pardhan, the Bhumia do not generally know of this institution. I only heard of two *kher* of the Bhumia who employed a Pardhan; the Tiljaria and the Surajpuria. It is significant that among the Bhumia not the clans (*kur*), but the territorial units (*kher*) employ Pardhan if they do so at all.

#### 4. BHUMIA AND GOND UNDER GOVERNMENT RULE

While in the past the Gond have been able to establish several independent states and to maintain them for shorter or longer periods, no traditions exist which show how the Bhumia were ruled previous to the rise of the historical kingdoms in Central India. Most probably the Bhumia never reached the stage of a united Bhumia kingdom, and never formed a union of the numerous tribal clans and families under one ruler or chief. Though one of my informants had heard of a Bhumia Raja at Kharihan, he could not say where that place was and whether that kingdom still existed. At present, the Bhumia feel keenly the need for an adequate representation of their own tribal concerns in the Indian Government and deplore the absence of able leaders and representatives in their community.

Though the Gond, on the other hand, are better represented in Parliament and in the Legislative Councils, their participation in forming Government policy is not at all in correspondence with their numbers. At the last elections, the Congress Party put up several Gond candidates in various districts and they were elected on the Congress ticket. These candidates,



however, had either so completely adopted non-tribal ways of life that they could not adequately put forward the problems of aboriginal Gond, or they were so backward that they could not make themselves heard in the Councils.

In past times when the Indian Government machinery was not yet as fully developed as at present, Gond and Bhumia were like many other hill tribes left to themselves and allowed to govern themselves. Their caste councils and village panchayats gave the necessary directives and punished offenders in accordance with an undisputed traditional penal and moral code. Things became different when the British administration took over. Gradually, its control grew stronger, and its influence made itself felt even in the remotest recesses of the jungle tracts. No doubt, Government measures meant well for the poor man and the law aimed at impartial justice. But laws and regulations which suited the more advanced cultivators of the plains, worked harshly where conditions were so primitive; and wily landlords, cunning lawyers and ruthless usurers managed to turn the very courts of justice into a means of robbing the aboriginals of their lawful rights.<sup>4</sup> Gond and Bhumia who for so long had been used to getting along without any Government regulations were often bewildered by laws and regulations of which they had no understanding and which often went against their own cherished tribal traditions.

In present times, minor Government officials often act tactlessly in dealing with these tribal people, and it must be said that Gond and Bhumia in general often consider any offence against Government rules justified unless it also acts against tribal custom. This attitude applies especially to the game laws, to unlawful collection of jungle produce and illicit distillation.

Though the Gond and Bhumia may be the original owners of the land which they now inhabit, they are wrong in claiming the freedom of the forest forever. That they were the first to occupy these vast empty tracts, is no longer sufficient title to the perpetual possession of so much good land in lovely leisure and indolence. In these frightening days when the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. de Meulder (1944): p. 3 f.

peoples of India press against one another for air, for living space, and for bread, the aborigines cannot any longer rest lazily on the unbroken earth because their forefathers did so. If they are not willing to till it themselves, they must yield it to other men who are starving.

It is clear, however, that the confused and negative attitude of the aboriginals towards the Government in general and its officials in particular is not conducive to a strict observance of Government laws and regulations. In fact, the aboriginals think nothing of breaking such laws when they have the opportunity to do so and without danger of being found out. They cannot get used to the idea that the jungle is not theirs and that they may not cut wood, graze cattle and collect forest products without paying for it. This unlawful appropriation of the forest and its products goes moreover hand in hand with an often needlessly wasteful treatment of the jungle. The forest-dwellers seem to have no idea of the value of wood and nonchalantly cut down a good tree for fuel or to get easier access to a beehive. They do not grasp the reason why the Forest Department is so anxious to protect the growth of bamboo and forbids the cutting of fresh bamboo sprouts for vegetables. Without any sense of guilt they take whatever they find in the jungle and reply: 'But it is Government land; therefore it belongs to us.'

When surprised in an act of transgression of the game laws and other forest regulations, they often attempt to bribe the officials investigating the case. For they believe that forest guards and police officials have no other *raison d'être* than to harass the poor jungle-dwellers and to extort money from them.

The complicated procedure of the criminal court simply bewilders them. Often they do not understand why they are summoned to appear in court, why they are punished, and they have no idea about the seriousness of their offence. They suspect that all officials handle their cases in an arbitrary manner and that they must be bribed to pass a favourable judgment. They also believe that they cannot get a hearing from revenue officers for a petition unless they first bribe them, or at least their peons and secretaries.



While, no doubt, much of the resentment of the aborigines against Government and its officials is unjustified and due to their ignorance and lack of legal and political education, not all their grievances are baseless. Aborigines often complain that Government officials, tahsildars, revenue inspectors, officials of the Excise, Police and Forest Departments do not care for them. The rigid and high-handed manner in which certain Government officials enforce laws and regulations in the jungle tracts no doubt often cause just resentment.

It must also be admitted that the best officials are not always sent into the tribal areas. Too often less qualified or less able officials are posted in these districts, and sometimes a transfer to an aboriginal district is given as punishment. This practice of punishing subordinates by having them transferred to tribal areas is deplorable. If a man cannot be trusted, he should not be placed at a post where he is quite out of any control. Also, officials are often not quite qualified for work among the aborigines. They are ignorant of their customs and traditions, despise them and ridicule them. Most of them do not like to stay long enough among aborigines to get thoroughly acquainted with them; they often get sick in these malaria-infested districts, they lack congenial company and the amenities of modern civilization. Travelling is difficult and tedious in the hills where there are no roads, food is scarce and hospitality less generous than among the non-tribal agriculturists.

While it is impossible to prove how far the aborigines are right in their complaints that many lower officials of the Revenue, Police, Excise and Forest Departments are open to bribes and resort to extortion, too many instances of such cases are known to assume that their allegations are much exaggerated.

The land surveyors, for instance, take money for every little service which they render in the normal execution of their duties. They are notorious for accepting bribes and extorting money for suppressing reports of technical offences or petty breaches of Government regulations. When they hold crop examinations or fix the land tax, a well-timed bribe is said to influence their assessment considerably.

Forest guards, it is said, cause as much trouble and annoyance. They fine the jungle-dwellers for petty offences with utmost severity or wrongly unless they are appeased with heavy bribes. The same is said of police and excise officers. No doubt, there is some truth in these allegations. But it must also be realized that many petty Government officials are greatly underpaid and rely for their sustenance on these traditional tips which the non-tribal agriculturists are in the habit of paying as a matter of course and which do not seem so exorbitant to wealthy farmers. If the same rates are demanded from starving aboriginals, it is another matter. Recourse is, of course, always open to higher officials. But complaints are not always accepted. Extortions and bribes cannot easily be proved in court, especially because witnesses are scared to come forward and to give evidence against Government officials. Moreover, a court case involves heavy expenses and often much loss of time. Plaintiffs are often called to court, at most inconvenient times, and to places distant from their home village.

It must be stated, however, that Government is making strenuous efforts to 'uplift' the backward classes of the whole of India. The task is gigantic, as it involves the education and uplift, socially and economically, of about 25 million aboriginals and 60 million depressed classes. Many mistakes are made; but the intention is good, and gradually Government officials and voluntary social workers will learn by proper training and by experience how to master the problems of the aboriginals and depressed classes. It will however take several generations for the conditions of the aboriginals to improve. The present generation will not profit much from the schemes which have been planned, but not yet carried out.



PART III

THE LIFE HISTORY OF  
THE INDIVIDUAL





## CHAPTER XIII

# BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

### 1. MENSTRUATION

A GIRL picks up knowledge of menstruation and sex life from older girls and women or from observing the menstruation of her own mother. It is in keeping with the general slow growth of Bhumia and Gond children that girls seem to mature rather late. Menstruation does not usually begin before a girl is fourteen. Girls at this age are still rather undeveloped.

No special rites are performed on the occasion of first menstruation, nor is the girl kept in seclusion. She may go out and work in the fields, speak with her relatives, even with her male relatives. She is merely considered unclean and may not touch any food in the house.

The same rules must be observed at every following menstruation. During her monthly period a woman is not allowed to go near the water-pot or to cook. She is unclean and has to live and to sleep apart as long as her period lasts. Usually she sleeps on the veranda (*parchhi*) where she is in less danger of defiling anything. A menstruating woman may not enter the cowshed. She is allowed, however, to work in the fields. After menstruation, she must take a bath before she is permitted to take up her household duties again.

During his wife's menstruation, no Gond, Bhumia or Panka may perform any sacrifice. Nor must he touch the grain bin in the house or remove any grain from it. But he is allowed to grind it when some other member of the family has taken the grain from the bin. He should not go to his barn (*kanihar*) and, according to some informants, he may not plough or sow in his garden or field. But other informants said that sowing and ploughing are not forbidden. Customs vary in different villages. The husband of a menstruating woman must abstain from sexual intercourse with her as well as with other women;

it is believed that he would become impotent if he offended against this rule. A man may not beat his wife when she is in her period. If a Gond beats his wife when she is menstruating, he must give an expiatory dinner. The Bhumia, however, do not impose any punishment for such an action. A man whose wife is in her monthly period may not eat the head of any animal killed in hunting. It is believed that in future hunters would have no luck if he did so. It may be mentioned here that no Gond or Bhumia woman is allowed to eat the head of any animal killed in a hunt.

It is said that in the old days the restrictions during menstruation were more severe. In the past no husband was allowed to go near the flour mill or the place where the rice is husked. They had to perform an offering if they accidentally touched the grinding stone or the grain bin during this time.

My informants were ignorant of any myths which would explain the fact of menstruation or the rules of avoidance connected with it. They did not know what physiological process caused the monthly period, though they knew the physical effects of it; the passing of blood, etc. Contrary to the practice in some non-tribal castes, aboriginal women do not seem to keep these facts secret from men.

Menstruation is called *ajar pani* (dirty water), *mahina ki bimari* (monthly illness) or *bahar bimari* (external illness).

It is worth mentioning that the rules of avoidance which apply to a menstruating woman are also observed among the non-tribal castes of the district. But non-tribal husbands need not observe any of the rules and restrictions which Gond and Bhumia husbands observe. It is difficult to say whether the Gond or the Bhumia are responsible for these restrictions, or whether both tribes have adopted them from a third source.

## 2. PREGNANCY

During pregnancy, Gond and Bhumia women carry on their ordinary housework till the last day. There are no special rules of avoidance for pregnant women. Sexual intercourse



ceases only in advanced pregnancy, and this separation lasts until two to four months after the birth.

Unlike the non-tribals, Gond and Bhumia do not seem to be particularly afraid of the spirit of women who died in pregnancy. They know that non-tribals dread these spirits which they call *churelin*, but they themselves take no special precautions against the evil influences of such spirits.

When a woman dies in an advanced state of pregnancy, her womb may be cut open at the graveyard and the foetus removed. It is buried at the left side of the mother in a separate grave. According to other information, they let the child in the womb die with the mother. A woman who dies in pregnancy is buried, not burned. She is 'united with *Bara deo*' by the usual funeral rites.

Gond and Bhumia are of course aware that pregnancy is the result of sexual intercourse (which is often expressed by the simile: tobacco—pipe, or: to give tobacco to the pipe). They also know that nine months pass between conception and birth, and that a woman's menstruation ceases when she has conceived.

### 3. The Birth

When a Bhumia or Gond woman begins to feel her labour-pains, the midwife is called. The midwife of the Bhumia, called *sun-mai* or *suin-mai*, should be a Bhumia by caste; only in difficult cases may a Gond woman be called for assistance. The Gond, however, though they prefer a Gond midwife wherever available, also employ the services of Chamar, Dhulia, Basor or Panka midwives. These midwives receive no special training; usually they are women who show special liking or skill for nursing expectant mothers or women after childbirth. A midwife often takes her daughter along to help and eventually to learn the secrets of her profession. At Bijora, for instance, the Bhumia midwife of the village trained her daughter who now helps the women in childbirth.

A Gond or Bhumia midwife offers her services free of charge. Only when the birth is very difficult and several women have to be called to help, is the child's father sup-

posed to give a piece of cloth as a present to each woman; but money is not accepted. A Gond who employs a low-caste midwife pays her about five rupees and gives her a piece of cloth (*orhni*).

The midwife attends to the women during and after childbirth as long as her services are required. If after birth the mother feels pains or gets ill, the midwife nurses her as best as she can and as long as necessary. But in ordinary cases her help is required for one or two days only.

Gond and Bhumia women have as a rule easy births and do not require much help from the midwife. But when the delivery is difficult and protracted, and the midwife is at the end of her wits, resort is taken to magic. A bullet is bathed in water and the water given to the woman in labour to drink. Just as the bullet is expelled from the gun, so the child should be expelled from the womb of the mother. If this and other similar magic practices do not help—they are equally popular among non-tribal women—a soothsayer (*gunia*) is called to search for the cause of such protracted delivery. He usually advises an offering to a certain deity. After the offering has been performed, the delivery is expected to take place immediately. Meanwhile, ordinary remedies are not neglected; the other women never cease massaging the woman in labour. If this does not help and if the offering of the soothsayer is equally unsuccessful, the woman is left to die with her child. On rare occasions, a man is called who, blindfolded, cuts to pieces with a knife the unborn child, and then extracts the parts to save the life of the mother. Women never perform such dangerous surgical operations.

Usually no man, not even the father, is allowed to attend the birth of the child. Five- or six-year-old boys are already too big to watch the event, but smaller boys are allowed to stay in the room. Girls of all ages are permitted to attend a childbirth. The women in the room, however, render actual assistance only when the midwife cannot manage alone.

The birth takes place in the house. The woman in labour is made comfortable on a cloth padding on which she squats with her knees drawn up close to the body. The midwife assists her by massaging her limbs, waist and back.



When the child is born, the women bring a winnowing scoop (*supā*) on which they pour about a *kuru* of *kodo*. The baby is laid naked on the grain; its first sleep should be on the *An deo* ('god of plenty'). The *kodo* is afterwards given to the midwife who takes it home, washes it and gives it to her husband to sow in the next spring.

The umbilical cord is not cut until the placenta (*phul*, i.e. flower) has come out. Some grass is placed on the floor; the woman is laid down on it, the child at her side on the *kodo* in the winnowing fan. It is feared that the placenta would remain in the womb and even penetrate deeper into it if the cord were cut prematurely.

When the after-birth has at last come, a Bhumia midwife ties the umbilical cord of the baby and cuts it with the sharp edge of the split stem of a *bharwa* or *chirra* grass. A Gond midwife cuts the cord with a sickle or knife. About half a foot or at least several inches of the cord (*nala*) is left dangling and allowed to dry on the baby. It falls off five or six days later. The placenta is buried in the house, in a hole near the spot where the woman gave birth, but well away from the hearth. The door of the house is shut when the placenta is buried. The hole is filled up and the loose soil well stamped down and levelled. Then a fire is lit on the spot and kept burning for five or six days, till the rest of the navel cord drops.

Meanwhile, some women prepare warm water for a bath. In the water they pour some disinfectant ingredients, the bark of *batwan*, the bark and flowers of *sampalar*, *jamrassi* and the root or bark of *bansemi* (wild beans). These ingredients are well pounded to a fine powder before they are poured into the hot water. Immediately before the bath, a *lota* is filled with hot water, then a sickle is heated and dipped into the water. They believe that the strength of the iron will be transmitted to the water by this procedure. The mother then drinks the water; afterwards she is bathed in a corner of the veranda. The midwife also bathes the child and then lays it into the lap of its mother. The mother takes her new-born baby to her breast and feeds it for the first time.

If the mother's breasts are dry, as sometimes happens, the baby is not fed at all, because it is a rule that the first food which a child receives must be her mother's milk.

At one village, a young woman bore a child in May, the hottest month of the year. The mother could not suckle her child, which was left for three days without a drop of milk or water. A stranger had the sense of giving the baby some cow's milk; otherwise the baby would have died.

About five or six hours after the birth, the mother gets her first meal. It consists of a concoction of the roots of *okhat* (?) and of beans (*semi*). The roots are ground to powder on the stone on which they usually grind spices (*silota*), mixed with the beans and the mixture is boiled in water. The mother drinks this tea to still the pains of birth. The same concoction is given when the mother feels faint and weak. If from loss of blood and weakness her body becomes cold and numb (a state called *barsudh*), a hot tea is served to warm her.

After a while the woman is given *maria* bread. *Maria* is a very small grain, smaller even than *kutki*. (It is sown at the beginning of the monsoon and reaped in the month of Karttik. The seed is contained in a ball, not in an ear like *kutki*.) The grain is ground to flour, then mixed with water and kneaded. The flat cakes formed from this dough are baked between two stone slabs covered with smouldering coals.

About twelve hours after the birth, the woman is served some *kodai* or rice gruel, but only a little.

Mother and baby must stay in the house for five or six days till the umbilical cord of the baby has dried and dropped off. A bed is prepared in a corner of the room or on the veranda (*parchhi*); that is, a few bundles of *khas* grass (*Andropogon muricatus*) are spread on the floor where the mother can rest with the baby in her lap or at her side on the grass. A fire is kept burning all the while beside the bed to keep mother and child warm and snug and to prevent the flies from setting on the wound of the navel.

The mother may not leave the protective roof of the house, and even when she wants to take her bath, she does not go



further than the corner of the veranda. For protection against evil spirits, she keeps a sickle under her blanket; when she goes outside for a call of nature, she takes it along, hidden under a fold of her dress.

As long as the umbilical cord has not dropped, the mother is served only porridge. During these five or six days she is well attended by her relatives. The midwife, however, after taking a hot bath in the house and washing her's and the mother's clothes, leaves on the very day on which the birth took place and only occasionally pays a visit to the mother on one of the following days to inquire how mother and child are faring.

During these days, the father of the child is not much restricted in his movements; he must only avoid the threshing floor, nor may he attend a sacrifice or accept sacrificial food (*prashad*).

When the umbilical cord of the baby has dried and dropped off, the fire on the spot where the after-birth was buried is put out and the hole again opened. Then the dried-up piece of navel-string is buried in the same hole. The hole is filled and the ground over it levelled and smeared with fresh cow-dung. Every trace of the fire, coal, ashes and soot, is obliterated. After that the mother wraps her baby, who up to now has been lying naked in her lap or at her side, in a sheet which she ties around one shoulder. Then she begins to do her usual housework, though she may not yet cook or fetch water from the well.

The Gond and Panka, not however the Bhumia, call the barber (*nau*) on the thirteenth day after the birth. He cuts the hair of the child, and also of the child's father and other male relatives, and pares the finger- and toe-nails of its mother. If the barber is not available, the *nat* relatives do it instead. A washerman (*dhobi*) is called to wash the clothes of all in the house. If the washerman cannot come, they take him a cloth which he must wash. The other clothes may then be washed at home. A Brahmin is invited to recite some prayers ('to read something out of a book', my Gond informants said). It is for the child's health. The villagers are

invited for a meal, or get at least some liquor or sugar.<sup>1</sup>

The barber is paid one and a half rupees for his service; and the fee is sent to him if he is absent. The washerman receives one rupee four annas; the Brahmin one to two rupees.

This feast is regarded as a purification ceremony for all the members of the family. From now on all restrictions cease, the child's mother may again cook and fetch water from the well, and its father may enter his threshing floor and take part in a sacrifice. The observance of these restrictions is especially hard in a small family, for if there are no other women in the house, the child's father himself must do all the cooking and also fetch the water from the well.

While the Gond and Panka hold this purification ceremony on the thirteenth day after the birth, the Bhumia, who have no such ceremony, allow the mother to begin with the cooking only after forty days, and that too only if she bears a boy. If a girl is born, she is regarded as unclean for two months.

The purification ceremony on the thirteenth day is called *chatti*. The father of the child buys for his wife a new *lagra* and lac bangles. The cloth must be of white colour; it is not permitted to buy cloth of any other colour. The *nat* relatives dress the mother and also put the bangles on her wrists.

If twins are born, they seldom survive for want of proper nourishment. If the mother has not sufficient milk to feed both babies, they receive cow's milk when such is available, or the juice of a certain plant called *dudh kanda* (milk root). Its onion is thick and juicy and quite nourishing. Twin births are not so rare; but it is rare to find twins who have survived. Twin brothers are called Ram-Lakshman, twin sisters Chita-Kota or Ganga-Jumna, after the twin brothers Rama and Lakshman, and the twin sisters Chita and Kota of Hindu mythology, or the twin rivers Ganges and Jumna which meet at Allahabad.

It also happens that children are born after only seven months of pregnancy. Such children survive with difficulty. But there is no evidence that children born after eight months'

<sup>1</sup> This is a custom common to all non-tribal castes in Mandla District. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, p. 136.



pregnancy have less chance of survival than children born after seven months' pregnancy, as the non-tribals believe.

If a child is still-born, the body is placed in an earthenware pitcher (*handi*) and buried either in the house with the after-birth, or somewhere outside behind the house or in the jungle. It is strange that there are so few defective or deformed children among the aborigines. People emphatically deny that such children are killed after birth, but probably the lack of care bestowed on them is deadly enough. The merciless system of selection through survival of the fittest ensures that sickly or crippled children quickly succumb. Monstrosities are killed, however, for they are not considered human. Generally they die anyway soon after birth and are buried with the after-birth.

If a woman dies in advanced pregnancy, her body is sometimes cut open, the child extracted and, if dead, buried in the arms of its mother. This was done in a village in the southern parts of eastern Mandla. At other places the child is buried separately. A woman who dies in childbirth is buried if her baby also dies. But if the child survives, the woman is burned. Cremation is resorted to of course only at places where it is the rule to cremate adults who have died.

A child rarely survives if its mother dies in childbirth. No other woman will suckle it, and it has to be raised on cow's or goat's milk. I was even told by one informant that if a woman dies in childbirth or soon after, her baby though it might be quite healthy is simply put into her arms and buried with her, for people say that the child has little chance of survival. Other informants indignantly denied this and stated that everything possible was done to save the child's life. It is given to another woman to nurse. It must be adopted by that woman, for no woman may accept payment for taking care of a baby. When the child is about five years old, its father may demand its return to his care. The father has to pay fifty or a hundred rupees for its upbringing; if the father cannot pay so much, the child remains with its foster-mother. Its father, however, has the right to demand the child's return if he can pay the money in the next ten years, before the child is fifteen.

If a child is already weaned when its mother dies, the father does not give it away to another woman. Usually he marries again in order to have somebody to look after the children. An adopted child is called *pal-poshan*. There are no special rites of adoption; the mere fact that a woman accepts the baby as her own and promises to care for it is enough.

The few crippled and defective children that survive are cared for by relatives and other persons who take pity on them.

Infant mortality is high. The Bhumia, however, believe that it is higher among the Gond than among the Bhumia. Many children die in early childhood, in the first year after birth, or between the age of five and ten. One of my informants was father of five children, but only two had survived early childhood. At Duhania, I found only one among a group of 18 families, with five children alive. There are no statistics available for infant mortality among the Gond and Bhumia, but in the Narbada Valley Division of the Central Provinces, to which Mandla District belongs, deaths at the age of one year and below were 259 for 1,000 male and 236 for 1,000 girl children. The birth-rate was 43.68 per cent, infant deaths 24.7 per cent in the years between 1921 and 1931.<sup>2</sup> It is safe to assume that infant mortality in eastern Mandla is considerably higher than stated here, because the above-mentioned statistics also include the numbers of non-tribal children who have a better chance of survival.

#### 4. NAME-GIVING

There is no special ceremony when the child is named. The name is given any time after birth. Often the baby receives its name on the day of its birth. The father or the mother gives the name which the village watchman (*kotwar*) enters in his register when he makes his weekly report to the police station. This name is not used by the people, who scarcely know it. It is meant for the police station only. On some other occasion, the child receives another name, which is then used by the people.

<sup>2</sup> *Census of India, 1931, Vol. XII, Part I.*



Every Gond and Bhumia has at least two names; some have three. One is the personal name given shortly after birth; but in addition to this another name is given as a nickname. This name which may be bestowed on a child when it is half-grown or in adolescence by friends or companions often has a relation to a special habit or characteristic trait in the child. My informant Panga, for instance, got his nickname from his habit of walking with slightly bended knees. 'Panga' means 'weak-kneed'. Panga's personal name is Hathu.

The personal name may be used only by officials; all others, such as relatives, caste fellows and fellow villagers use only the nickname.

These nicknames may be pronounced even by such relatives who on no account would be permitted to use the personal name, like husband and wife, father-in-law and daughter-in-law, etc. Persons may be addressed by their nicknames even at night when they consider it dangerous to use the personal name in address for fear that they might be overheard by evil spirits out to harm them.<sup>3</sup>

## 5. EARLY CHILDHOOD

Small babies are entrusted to the care of their mothers and sisters. Grandparents too old to work in the fields also take care of the small children when the parents are at work. Otherwise the mother takes her baby along to the field or on a journey. She carries the baby on the back or on the hip in a sling. The sheet is slung over the right shoulder and tied at the chest. Thus the mother has both hands free for work. Though it may not be healthy for the baby while it needs rest to be carried around wherever the mother goes,

<sup>3</sup> This custom of calling persons by names other than their personal names is general in India and not restricted to the aboriginal tribes of eastern Mandla. It is popular as a ruse for baffling evil spirits who, as it is believed, can hurt only those whose real names they know. Cf. J. Abbott, (1932): pp. 47 ff. The belief that the real name is a constitutive part of a person and that by knowing a person's name one gains power over him is found in many primitive tribes. In ancient India it was believed that *nama rupa* (name and form) constitute the individual personality. Cf. H. Lueders (1951): p. 21.

it would often be dangerous to leave a baby alone and uncared for in the house.

Child nursing is very primitive in eastern Mandla. The child is suckled as long as the mother has any milk. It is fed whenever it begins to cry. When a mother is unable to feed her child, goat's milk is the usual substitute. Where cow's milk is available, it is also given to the baby. When no milk can be had, the baby is raised on rice water or on the juice of the *dudhia* tuber.

Later in life, the children get their *kodai* gruel or porridge twice a day. Jungle and garden provide them with some additional food. Half-grown boys while away their time hunting partridges, doves, rats, or other animals which they catch with primitive traps or with a well-aimed stone-throw. Birds are trapped with a small bamboo mat held up at one side by a light stick. When a bird comes and picks up a few grains spread under the mat, it knocks down the stick and is caught under the falling mat. Sometimes a string is tied to the stick which is thrown off its balance by a sudden jerk.

Occasionally children get presents of food from relatives and other people in the village. During harvest time they are allowed to take a cob or two of maize, or some other fruits, which they prepare and eat either alone or in company with others. In the latter case, all the collected gifts are pooled and equally distributed among the whole group.

The children are generally not ill-fed. Nevertheless most of them look undernourished. This is probably due to lack of proper food during the lactation period, when their mothers' milk began to dry up and they did not get other food.

Unfortunately, no measurements have yet been taken of Bhumia or Gond children which would allow comparison with the growth of children in other communities of India and in other countries. According to my observation, the growth of children seems to be retarded in early age. Children of eight or ten years of age look as if they were only six; only after their fourteenth or fifteenth year do they seem to grow more quickly. At Bijora I saw a girl whom I judged to be six or at the most seven, but according to the birth register she was nine. A boy of seven I judged to be four or five years old.



Mentally also, Gond and Bhumia children seem to mature comparatively late.

### *Childlessness*

Gond and Bhumia do not think that childlessness may be due to a physical defect. They believe that a woman is made barren by a ghost (*bhut*) or spirit (*deo*) who enters her body through the vagina. Or her barrenness may be caused by witchcraft. It is the task of the diviner (*gunia*) to find its true cause and to prescribe the ways and means by which this curse can be lifted. For childlessness is considered a curse and motherhood the most desirable dignity of a woman. Children are the mainstay of a marriage, the joy and pride of their parents, their support and security in old age.

When the diviner has found by various methods which spirit is responsible for the sterility of a woman—it does not easily enter the mind of a Gond or Bhumia that the husband could be responsible for his wife's childlessness—he begins his exorcism by incantations and invocations, and promises the evil spirit a fowl or even a goat or pig, and one or several coconuts. It is believed that such a promise is usually sufficient to make the spirit of sterility depart. Shortly afterwards the woman is expected to conceive. According to my Bhumia informants, the name of one of the spirits of sterility is Sandhuria.

The promise of the diviner must be fulfilled when the woman has borne her child. But the people take no chances: they wait until the child is about two years old. If the child dies before it reaches two years, no sacrifice is performed. The fowl or goat promised is, however, not killed in sacrifice, it is chased into the jungle. The coconuts are broken and distributed.

If the soothsayer finds that the sterility of the woman is due to witchcraft, it is his task to counteract this spell.

Barren women often fast on the Cherta (*Kichrahi*) festival, in the hope that the elephant-headed *Ganesh* will bless them with a child.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Other means to secure offspring are: a pilgrimage of husband and

It is also believed that sterility may be the result of a sinful life in this or in a former life. A witch, for instance, is believed to be reborn as a barren woman. Since, however, it is not possible to ascertain that sterility is caused by an immoral life or by the agencies of an evil spirit or witch, barren women are not treated as sinners or secret criminals. The usual course is that when a man gives up hope of ever getting a child from his wife, he decides to marry another girl.

## 6. EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

Although Gond and Bhumia are so anxious to have children, they take little trouble in educating them. The education which is imparted at home is indeed very slight; but the forceful check which is exercised by public opinion and by the regulations and traditions of the caste, counterbalance any neglect of the family in educating their children properly. The control which the village and caste authorities exercise makes itself felt as soon as the child is old enough to mix with other children. Though caste discrimination is not as rigidly enforced for children as for adults, the children are nevertheless soon taught what they might do and what not, with whom they might associate and whom they have to avoid. Gradually the control of caste tradition and caste law tightens, until it is enforced to the full when boy and girl become mature and are on the point of getting married.

The village community and the caste council have economic and social sanctions at their disposal which are powerful enough to enforce a strict observance of the traditional moral code. Children who do not behave according to the general standard become unpopular among their playmates and are left alone; youths and girls who want their own way or misbehave soon experience difficulty in finding sweethearts and marriage partners; women with a bad temper get into danger of being decried as witches; men and women with loose morals or dishonest or violent character, get into conflict on one or

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wife to some famous shrine, to Amarkantak (spring of the Narbada) or to the Ganges; to give alms to Brahmins and religious mendicants, to sisters and daughters.



the other occasion with the village or caste authorities, and may be ruined by fines and excommunications. In a community in which the economic balance is so unstable, in which each individual and family lives on the verge of starvation, such sanctions as are applied by the caste and village councils are sufficiently powerful to mould the character of each caste member from early youth into a form which makes strict observance of the caste rules and regulations the easiest and most natural course of behaviour.

If home education is rather superficial and haphazard, it is not altogether lacking. A few rules of ordinary honesty are from time to time inculcated into a child, especially when a naughty trick played by it causes trouble in the family. But there is no systematic effort towards forming a child's character. Obedience by a girl in the everyday routine of work in the home is sometimes insisted upon by her mother, and occasionally a father impresses upon his son regard for authority, but if a child is stubborn and disobedient, not much notice is taken.

A boy soon begins to follow his father into the fields where he helps in a leisurely way, or minds the bullocks kept for work. There is plenty of time left for play with sisters and brothers and other children of the hamlet. Girls of four or five already segregate from the boys; they have their own games, or are kept busy helping their mothers with the household chores. They fetch water in small pitchers; tend the fire, sweep the floor, collect cattle manure, clean grain and, mainly, take care of their younger brothers and sisters when the mother is busy with other work. It is a droll sight to see little girls, as they play with their companions, with a baby clinging to them like a parasite astride their hip. The top-heavy burden imposed on their frail bodies causes them to tumble and stumble.

Children are gradually accustomed to work. They are given ample leisure for play; but occasionally they are called to help. Children playfully try to imitate their parents, boys helping their fathers and elder brothers, girls their mothers, aunts and sisters-in-law. At first, little notice is taken of their efforts. Help is accepted as a matter of course, while a

failure of the child is just equally casually ignored, never laughed at. Thus the children gain confidence and become more helpful as they grow. Gradually and imperceptibly they are drawn into the everyday routine of work and themselves accept their little tasks as a matter of fact. With their growing strength and ability they are put to heavier and more difficult tasks which at first they are proud to fulfil and then obliged to do. With all the leisure for play and recreation, children are rarely overworked.

This is the traditional form of training which Gond and Bhumia children receive for life. In the past, of course, school education had no room at all in child-training. Nor was its need ever felt in the simple life as cultivators and jungle-dwellers. The Gond, and still more so the Bhumia, in eastern Mandla are still much averse to sending their children to school. Now that schools have been opened in the aboriginal tracts also and Government officials are anxious to show good attendance in the schools of their districts, Gond and Bhumia do not actually prevent their children from attending school if the children themselves are anxious to learn. But they rarely force them to go to school. The consequence is, naturally, that few children attend school regularly; most of them soon get bored or are prevented from attendance by work or other occupation.

In 1931 only 22 out of 1,000 Baiga were literate, and 32 out of 10,000 had received an English education. Among the Gond, only nine out of 1,000 were literate, and two out of 10,000 were literate in English.<sup>5</sup>

There is absolutely no trace of a dormitory system among the Bhumia and Gond of eastern Mandla, though the Bhuiya from whom the Bhumia are said to be an offspring, and also the Gond in the southern areas of Gondwana, have this system of youth associations and dormitories.

<sup>5</sup> *Census of India, 1931, Vol. XII, Part I, p. 290.*



## CHAPTER XIV

### MARRIAGE

AMONG the Gond and Bhumia marriage is not merely a matter of personal choice or a private affair between two lovers; it is equally the concern of the family, of the village community, and of the caste. The caste forbids and severely punishes marriage with outsiders or with relatives in a prohibitive degree. The village community takes a special interest in the observance of the rites and ceremonies connected with a wedding, and acts as a witness and interested friend, not a little also to its own enjoyment. The family is much interested in the choice of the right partner, and the members of the family insist on having their say in the selection of the partner. This influence of the relatives in the choice of one's partner was not so strong in the past; it has grown with the gradual introduction of child-marriage. In the past, boys and girls had greater freedom in choosing their mates; it is still customary to ask a boy for his consent when a bride has been found for him. To obtain his consent, relatives are occasionally not averse to using rather forcible means of persuasion. A girl can be more easily bullied into marrying an unwanted partner. With the lowering of the marriageable age, an adaptation to a non-tribal custom, which in these parts of India is looked upon as a social distinction, the influence of parents and relatives in the arrangement of a marriage has much increased, the spouses themselves becoming merely incidental parties to the contract. As half-grown children, they are unable to make their wishes known and are often not sufficiently interested to influence at all the choice of marriage partners.

This loss of freedom in the choice of marriage partners is somewhat counterbalanced by the ease with which a marriage can be dissolved. Divorce has, apparently, always been easy in Gond and Bhumia society; but now, with the more frequent interference of relatives in the choice of partners, cases of ill-

matched marriages seem to be on the increase. Persons forced into marrying a partner whom they dislike are free to separate and to marry again. For economic reasons, husbands rarely dismiss their wives lightly; it is the women who assume the initiative in bringing about a divorce. Divorce by elopement is a recognized institution of the caste, and a self-willed and determined woman usually gets her own way, though her escapade may cause her kinsmen great inconvenience and financial loss.

On the whole, child marriage is not yet very common. According to the Census Report of 1931, the Baiga, of which caste the Bhumia are the least Hinduised sub-group, take the 57th place among the 80 castes arranged in order of frequency of child-marriage. The Gond take the 55th place in the same category.<sup>1</sup> In eastern Mandla, girls are rarely married before puberty, and boys often have to wait much longer.

The marriage rites of the Gond and the Bhumia are very much alike; they differ only in a few points. A comparison of the Gond and Bhumia wedding ceremonies with that of other castes and tribes in the district shows that at least in the essential parts they all conform closely to the non-tribal ritual. Each caste and tribe may have its peculiarities, but the differences are of minor importance.<sup>2</sup>

The adoption of the non-tribal wedding ritual seems of comparatively recent date. My Bhumia informant, Panga, told me that in the old times neither Gond nor Bhumia used to perform any of the elaborate wedding ceremonies as at present. When a boy grew up and thought he could support a wife, he went to the girl of his choice and asked her if she was willing to live with him. If she consented, both left their parents' house and went to another village where they began their married life. They built a house, and as the jungle at that time provided them with ample ground for cultivation,

<sup>1</sup> *Census of India, 1931, Vol. XII, Part I, p. 180.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for instance the wedding ritual of the Hinduised Halba, an important cultivating caste in the south of Raipur District (Russell and Hiralal: 1916; Vol. 3, pp. 188-94) or of the Kirar, a racially intermixed Rajput cultivating caste found mainly in the Jabalpur Division [Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, pp. 488-90].



they simply took possession of a plot of land, cleared it and cultivated it.

Nowadays, my informant said, the performance of the expensive and elaborate marriage ceremonies is considered indispensable. But marriage itself does not thereby become more stable. The new marriage rites are considered not so much as symbols of the sacredness and indissolubility of the marriage ties, but as a means to increase social prestige and as an occasion for enjoyment. A marriage celebrated with the most solemn rites is as easily dissolved as a marriage concluded in the old traditional and simple form.

### 1. THE ENGAGEMENT

When a boy has reached the age of twelve and a girl the age of ten years, their parents think of getting them married. The age of twelve, however, need not be taken too literally, for a boy of sixteen may also be called 'twelve years old'. Some youths reach the age of twenty before they get married.

When a man begins to think seriously that it is about time to arrange for the marriage of his son, he starts to make inquiries about a suitable girl. First of all, he looks out for a girl among his *nat* relationship, i.e. among the kinsmen of own wife or his sisters' husbands. The Gond and Bhumia, as mentioned before, prefer to marry into or take a wife from a family with which they are already well acquainted. It is quite common to exchange daughters in marriage between two family groups. Thus a girl often marries into the family of her mother, while a boy takes his wife from his mother's family. However, there are exceptions to this rule; if no suitable marriage partner can be found among the *nat* relatives, a match is arranged with another family. The family of the bride usually lives in another village; Gond and Bhumia rarely arrange a match between two families living in the same village.

When both parties find a union of their children desirable or at least possible, they fix a date for the formal engagement. This is called *sagai*. It usually takes place in the month of *Magh* (February) and can be performed on any

day of the week. But the most convenient day is the day after the weekly market (*bazaar*) in a near village.

The boy and girl concerned are not consulted unless they are both of age. Grown-up boys and girls may not be married against their consent. Not seldom it happens that a young girl is married to an elderly man. Such marriages do not always turn out unhappy. At one village, a man of seventy boasted that his girl wife was very happy with him. She was his second wife and got along very well with his first wife. He was sure that she liked him and would not run away.

On the day fixed for the formal engagement, the father of the boy invites some men of his village to accompany him to the village of his future daughter-in-law. He takes along five areca nuts (*supari*), *pan* leaves and cloves (*laung*), which he ties by means of a knot in a corner of his loincloth, some tobacco and country cigars (*biri*), and a few bottles of liquor. All these were bought on the previous day in the bazaar. The father of the girl expects the party with some impatience, since he is not at all quite sure of their arrival. They may fail to come even after the father of the boy has sent a message a few days earlier announcing his visit and asking if the visit would be welcome on that particular day. If the girl's father is prepared to receive the party on the day, he also invites a few men of his village to witness the engagement.

On the arrival of the party, the boy's father removes the areca nuts from the corner of his loincloth, cuts one into pieces with a nut-cutter (*saruta* or *sarotia*) and wraps the pieces with lime and cloves into a *pan* leaf which, without further ado, he shoves into the mouth of the girl's father. Then on a brass plate (*thali*) which he has brought along for this purpose, he offers the rest of the areca nuts to the girl's father who accepts one, cuts it, prepares *pan* and puts it into the mouth of the boy's father. This ceremony of welcome is repeated with every guest. The boy's father pours liquor into a leaf-cup and offers it to the girl's father who drinks and then offers liquor to the boy's father. After the two men have drunk—from this moment they call each other *samdhi* (relatives)—the others also drink in the same manner.



About five bottles of liquor are emptied on such an occasion. After a while the men sit down, smoke a pipe or cigar, chat and drink till it is time for dinner. The party stays for dinner no matter whether they come from a distant village or whether they belong to the same village where the bride lives. Among the Gond it is the custom that the boy's father brings along the provisions for the meal; five *kuru* of *kodai*, five *kureya* of lentils (*dar*), two pounds of salt, one pound of turmeric (*hardi*), half a pound of red pepper, a pint of oil. Among the Bhumia, the father of the bride must entertain his guests.

After dinner, the date of the forthcoming marriage is fixed. If boy or girl are still immature, the wedding is postponed for a year or two; otherwise the wedding follows soon after the betrothal. Once the engagement has been concluded, the wedding must take place, for neither party will go back on their word.

If the boy's relatives live in the same village, they return home after dinner. But if the guests hail from a distant village, they stay overnight and leave on the next morning soon after breakfast.

The prospective bridegroom is allowed to attend his own engagement, but he would be considered ill-mannered if he said a word or took part in the conversation. However, this rule is often broken if the bridegroom is a grown-up man, a widower or divorcee, or a man who wants the girl as his second wife, for, contrary to non-tribal custom, even a widower or divorcee or a married man may wed a virgin girl according to proper marriage rites.

The engagement is called *sagai*. The Bhumia call it *sagai* or *barokhi*, while the other castes of the district distinguish between *sagai* and *barokhi*.

#### *Payment of the Bride-Price*

A short time before the wedding, the parents of the bridegroom, accompanied by some friends or relatives of the same village, arrive at the house of the bride's parents to pay the bride-price. This ceremony is called *sukh chari* by the Bhumia, and *barokhi* by the Gond.

The bride-price (*sukh*) is fixed at nine silver rupees for the Gond, at seven for the Bhumia. There is no bargaining, as among the non-tribal castes. In addition, the bridegroom's father pays two rupees to the village council (*panch*), in some places three or four rupees. The Gond usually pay more than the Bhumia. This money is spent on liquor. The bride-price must be paid in silver coins; no bills are accepted on such a solemn occasion.

At the same time, the groom's father has also to hand over the provisions (*karchha*) for the wedding dinner: ten to fifteen *kuru* of *kodai*, one *kuru* of lentils, two pounds of salt, a pound or two of turmeric (*hardi*), about a pound of other spices like coriander (*dhaniya*), cummin (*jira*), garlic (*lahsun*), etc. He also gives a pound of red pepper (*mirchi*), two pounds of *ramtila* oil, one *kuru* of sesame (*til*), ten rupees worth of liquor (*daru*), a rupee to buy coarse cane sugar (*gur*) for persons who do not drink alcohol, two coconuts and a he-goat worth about twenty rupees. For the bride he must provide a *lagra*, and of course a loincloth and a turban for his son, the bridegroom.

The payment of the bride-price is accompanied by some ceremonies. When the bridegroom's party arrives, the bride's father asks his *samdhi* (the groom's father): 'When will the wedding take place?' The groom's father replies: 'Did we not already come with the provisions for the wedding?' (*Thola lane ki nahin?*)

Then the bridegroom's father produces the nine silver rupees and puts them on a brass plate (*thali*) provided by the bride's father. The two *samdhi* face each other, the plate lying on the ground between them. Now the bridegroom's father takes the plate and hands it to the bride's father who accepts it and again places it on the ground. After a short while he lifts the plate and returns it to the father of the bridegroom. The latter takes the plate and places it on the ground. After a while he once more takes the plate and offers it to the bride's father. This ceremony is repeated three times in a Bhumia marriage, five times in a Gond marriage. In the end, the bride's father accepts the bride-price and puts the money into his coat pocket. After that the bridegroom's



father brings the wedding clothes, dips each garment at a corner into turmeric paste and hands it over to the bride's father.

This done, the bridegroom's father offers some liquor. He takes a leaf-cup which another man fills with liquor from the bottle. Holding the leaf-cup in his right hand, he sprinkles a few drops on the ground, then pours the contents of the cup into the mouth of the bride's father. The latter returns the compliment in the same manner. After the two *samdhi* have had their drink, the other people too are offered liquor in leaf-cups. Somewhat later the groom's father cuts an areca nut with the nut-cutter (*saruta*), puts some unslaked lime on a *pan* leaf, wraps the crumbs of the nut into the leaf and shoves it into the mouth of the bride's father. The latter now prepares *pan supari* in the same manner and offers it to the groom's father. After that their wives exchange *pan supari* in the same manner. Then the other guests, too, take *pan*.

Among the Bhumia of Dindori it is not the custom for the bridegroom to attend the payment of the bride-price. The Gond, on the other hand, now perform a ceremony from which the bridegroom cannot absent himself. The place before the main entrance into the house is smeared with fresh cow-dung and a sack-cloth (*gunnia*) is spread over it. Bride and groom sit on the cloth, facing each other. Their arms are anointed with turmeric paste. After the anointing they have to embrace each other, putting right cheek to the other's left cheek, and must feed each other wheat or rice bread (*godala*). On this occasion the relatives like to play a joke on the young couple; they secretly put some pepper pods into the cakes. When boy and girl bite into the pods, they naturally make sour faces and begin to spit. Hurriedly they ask for water to rinse their mouth. Onlookers enjoy the scene immensely. Sometimes the bridal couple play a joke on their relatives. They refuse to eat. The bridegroom covers his mouth with his shirt end, while the bride draws her veil over her face. The relatives have to bribe the two into eating by putting some money—up to a rupee—into their hands. During the anointing and the following meal the Dhulia play a lively tune.

At the time of this ceremony the attendants for bride and

groom are appointed. It is the custom<sup>3</sup> for the groom and bride to have a boy and a girl attending on them during the wedding ceremonies. The two attendants, often an elder sister of the groom, resp. bride, and her husband, sometimes two unmarried persons, come and touch feet and chin of both groom and bride before the whole crowd. After the wedding they get a loincloth or *lugra* for their services.

Now, at last, there is a dinner, prepared by the women of the bride's family from the provisions which the groom's father had brought along. After dinner all go to sleep. Early next morning the guests rise. There is some discussion till they have fixed the date for the erection of the wedding booth (*marwa*). Then they take their leave and return home.

## 2. THE WEDDING

It is not necessary that the bride be sexually mature at the time of her wedding. If she has not yet reached puberty, she usually returns to her parents' home after the celebration. But sometimes she begins to live with her husband soon after the marriage, especially if the latter is no longer so young.

The marriage rites which are performed at the wedding of a virgin girl (*byauh*) are much the same for the Bhumia, Gond, Ahir and other tribes and castes of the district. They differ only in some unessential points.

It is the usual thing that weddings take place in the month of *Baisakh* (April-May) or *Asharh*, also in *Magh* (January-February), but not in *Jeth* (May-June). A wedding may be performed on any day of the week. Near Dindori, weddings are generally celebrated on Mondays or Tuesdays, because the weekly market at Dindori is on Sunday. This is the day when they buy the clothes and all the other requisites for the wedding.

On the eve of the wedding day, the father of the bridegroom sends two men to the family of the bride with the nuptial

<sup>3</sup> The custom is almost universal among the non-tribal people of Central India. These attendants are called *suasa* and *suasin*, from the Sanskrit word *svasār* or *svasr* which means 'sister'.



garments if these have not yet been handed over at the payment of the bride-price.

On the same day, all necessary preparations are made by both families. First of all an earthen pot (*harya*) is bought. At home it is decorated with two rings of cattle dung (*gobar*), one around the neck and the other around the body of the pot. These rings, about an inch broad and half an inch high, are connected with several (six to eight) vertical lines of the same material. Into these rings they stick barley (*jau*) or rice (*dhan*) grains, one and two grains alternately. The pot thus decorated is called *kalsa*.

When the pot is ready, the bridegroom pours three handfuls of *kodo* into it, and after him all his relatives do so, till the pot is full to the brim. They then place on the full pot an earthen lamp (*diya*) with a cotton wick soaked in oil. The pot is placed in a corner of the house, ready for use when required.

After that, a nut-cutter which he must hold till the wedding is over is put in the fist of the bridegroom.

### *The Lagun*

Now a divination is performed which is called *lagun*. It is done by the so-called *dosi*, the master of ceremonies at the wedding. If it is possible, the village priest (*dewar*, a Bhumia) is appointed for this office. Even the Gond and other tribes choose a Bhumia Dewar as *dosi*, if such a man is available; or else they ask an elderly relative of the bridegroom or the bride, a man, in any case, who knows the wedding rites well enough to act as master of ceremonies.

The *lagun* takes place in the cattleshed (*sar*). A long wooden stool (*pirha*), often only a square block of timber, is placed on the floor. A swastika (a cross surrounded by a circle, called *chauk*) is painted on the seat with ochre (*geru matti*). Where the cross-lines touch the circle, the *dosi* puts an areca nut and a turmeric stick. At the spot in the centre, where the straight lines cross each other, he places a paisa. Then a pad which the women carry on their head as a support for the water-pot (*gurhni*) is placed over the paisa, and on the pad a brass pot (*lota*) full of water.

Now the *dosi* takes in each hand a grain of rice which he holds between thumb and middle finger. Resting his hands on the brim of the brass pot (*lota*), he flicks the grains from opposite sides into the water. All watch intently whether the two grains in the water meet each other or not. If the grains meet, it is an indication that the gods approve of the marriage. If the grains miss each other, it is a sign that the marriage will not last. In such a case the wedding should not take place. But the *dosi* helps over the embarrassment by repeating the divination until at last two grains meet each other in the water. After the grains meet the *dosi* pushes them to the bottom of the *lota* and tries to find out with two new grains if the marriage will be a happy one. If the grains meet at the first attempt, all are pleased. However, if the result of this divination is not encouraging, they are not unduly disturbed and without any hesitation go ahead with their preparations for the wedding.

When the *dosi* has discovered how the marriage will turn out, and has inquired whether *Thakur deo* or *Bara deo*, *Bhagwan*, and other gods, approve of the marriage, he continues his divination and inquires whether he himself will always live in harmony with his wife; then, whether the *suasa* and the *suasin* will do their tasks to the satisfaction of all; or whether the wedding parties will come to a fight. Such fights frequently ensue after heavy drinking. Then the *dosi* inquires whether the two *samdhi* will always agree or not. All this questioning causes no end of merriment and is not taken too seriously. The *dosi* receives a fee of two or four annas for this divination.<sup>4</sup>

The *lagun* is performed in the house of the bridegroom as well as in the house of the bride. The grains used in the divination are collected by the *dosi* and sent through the waterman (*bishti*) to the *dosi* of the other party. The *dosi* of the bridegroom ties the grains received from the *dosi* of the bride into a fold of the groom's loincloth, while the *dosi* of the bride ties the grains received from the groom into a

<sup>4</sup> A similar form of divination is found among the Warli north of Bombay. But they accept it as a good omen if the rice grains in the water do not meet. Cf. K. J. Save (1945): pp. 59 f.



fold of the bride's *lagra*. The knots in the clothes of bride and groom are only opened after the wedding when they bathe in the river. At that time they pour the grains into the water.

After this divination, the *dosi* places on the brass pot an earthen lamp filled with oil, with a burning wick in the lamp. First of all, he slings a neck-ring of silver coins (*hawal*) around the neck of the *lota*, then another silver neck-ring (*chandi ka sutya*), and finally a pearl string (*gurya*). Next he sprinkles liquor over the brass pot thus decorated. The rest of the liquor he shares with the men.

After finishing all this, the silver ornaments are taken off and hung around the neck of the bridegroom. This is done in the cowshed where the *lagun* took place. Now the brass pot is removed, the areca nuts and the copper coin on the stool are tied into a fold of the bridegroom's scarf (*pichhori*). Another copper coin (*paisa*) and some turmeric sticks are wrapped into another scarf which is sent to the bride through the water-carrier. These turmeric (*hardi*) sticks are pounded to powder and made into a paste with which the bride is then anointed. The bridegroom, except for the *mangal matti* ceremony that now follows, is confined to the cowshed till evening when his attendants bring him back to the house. The same ceremony is performed in the house of the bride, except that she always remains in the house and is not brought to the cowshed.

### *The Mangal Matti Ceremony*

Shortly after the *lagun* divination, the *dosi* or the village priest leads the bridegroom outside to a pit near the house where the women usually dig for the clay with which they coat the floor of their houses and the grain bins. The bridegroom is accompanied by four women. The *dosi* is supposed to take a grain pestle (*musar*) along. If he forgets it or cannot find it because the women hide it, he must pay a *paisa* to each woman before they agree to hand it over to him. Sometimes there is a tussle when the *dosi* gets hold of the pestle because the women refuse to let him have it.

The *dosi* draws a swastika (*chauk*) on the ground near the

brink of the pit. The *chauk* is drawn with *kodai* flour in the usual form. In the centre of the *chauk*, the *dosi* places two *paisa* and then offers two *kodai* cakes (*godala*). He then burns *hom* in honour of *Thakur deo*, if he is a *Bhumia*, in honour of *Bara deo*, if he is a *Gond*, praying: '*Thakur deo, le*'. ('O *Thakur deo*, take this'). He also sprinkles liquor on the *chauk*.

Now the mother of the bridegroom or another woman closely related to him sits down near the pit with outstretched legs, and the groom is seated in her lap. Before this takes place the woman draws the end of her *luga* under her legs and spreads it at her right side. The *dosi* now takes the grain pestle, beats it with such force against the ground in the *chauk* that the *paisa* with some mud is thrown on the cloth spread out near the *chauk*. After that the bridegroom rises, assisted by the four women attendants, while his mother before getting up collects the earth in her *luga*. The other women now approach and take some more loose earth from the spot where the swastika had been drawn and carry it home in the fold of their *luga* or in their hands. The master of ceremonies carries the grain pestle and as much earth as he can conveniently carry. The earth is heaped up on the veranda of the house (*angana*).

### *The Erection of the Wedding Booth*

The *dosi*, accompanied by all caste fellows of the hamlet, goes now to the jungle to fetch poles for the wedding booth (*marwa*). He takes along two *kodai* cakes (*godala*) baked in oil, some cotton threads which have never been used before (*kori sut*), and all the ingredients for a *hom* offering. At a *Salhen* tree (or *Salai*, *Boswellia serrata* Roxb.) they stop. At the root of the tree the master of ceremonies draws a *chauk* in the usual form with *kodai* flour and places two *paisa* on it. Then he offers *hom*, pouring a little clarified butter (*ghee*) and fragrant gum resin on a glimmering dungcake. He next slings around the tree the cotton threads which should be of white thread dipped in turmeric water. Then he offers the two *kodai* cakes, breaking them into crumbs and throwing them on the ground around the tree. He also pours rice flour



and sprinkles liquor on the ground around the tree. The rest of the liquor he drinks with his companions.

After the offering, the *dosi* himself or another man climbs the tree and cuts a branch as thick as his thigh. On the ground again, he cuts off a piece about three cubits long. This he hews into a square post with a round, tapering top. The four sides of the post are decorated with criss-cross cuts. Some say that the post should represent a human figure, with a face, eyes, ears, a nose, mouth, arms and legs. But usually the figure is scarcely recognizable as a man's figure. Only wealthy people can spend much money on an artistically-carved post. If the *dosi* is not at the same time also the priest of the village, he leaves the cutting of the branch to the latter. Only if the *dewar* is absent, may the *dosi* or another man do the cutting. The wedding post which is called *sajan* by the Bhumia and *mangrohen* or *mangroli* by the Gond plays an essential role in the wedding ceremonial of these tribes. It is by walking around this post that the marriage is contracted.

When the wedding post is ready, the *dosi* cuts other poles and branches from a fig (*umar*) tree, then a thick dry bamboo of which he requires a piece about two cubits long, and a *Salhen* sapling, about six feet high or even higher, with all its branches intact. All these are required for the wedding booth.

Of the wood left over from the branch out of which the wedding post was carved, some flat square slabs, with four stumps at the corners as legs, are hewn. These wooden slabs (*pirha*) are made for the bride and groom to squat on during the wedding ceremonies.

Meanwhile, at the bridegroom's house rice has been cooked which a member of the family now carries on a huge plate to the party. The men, after they have finished their work, take their meal under the *Salhen* tree. Then they return home, the master of ceremonies carrying the wedding post on his shoulders, while the other men carry the wooden stools, the poles and branches for the wedding booth. Upon arrival at the bridegroom's house, the women surround the *dosi* and try to take the wedding post from him. If the man cannot free himself from the women, he must pay them a rupee.

Only then do they allow him to bring the wedding post on to the veranda of the house.

Now the women give the place where the wedding booth is to be erected a coating with fresh cattle manure. No white clay (*chuhi matti*) is used on this occasion. The *dosi* or *dewar* begins to dig the holes at the four corners of the wedding booth to be erected in front of the main entrance to the house. The other men finish the digging, set up the four corner posts, connect them with cross-beams and cover the whole structure with branches and leaves. The *dosi* draws a *chauk* in the middle of the wedding booth with *kodai* flour, puts two paisas on the *chauk* and begins to dig a hole as large as the *chauk*. The hole must be a foot deep. When he has reached the right depth, he wraps two paisas into a leaf and buries them in the hole. He places the wedding post behind the hole, together with the bamboo pole and the *Salhen* sapling. The village priest now offers *hom* and sprinkles liquor on the posts which he sets in the hole. While he straightens them, the others quickly fill the hole with gravel and earth which they stamp down and level with the ground. The personal attendants of the bridegroom, the *suasa* and *suasin*, now take the *mangal matti* (the earth which the *dosi* dug up with the grain pestle), pour water on it and make a thin mixture with which they cover the ground around the wedding post thus obliterating all traces of digging. After that, a corner of the *suasa's* loincloth is tied with the *lugra* of the *suasin*, and they take a threefold thread dipped in turmeric water. First they touch the wedding post with the turmeric stick, then tie the thread around it. The thread is led up to the cross-beam over the wedding post, wound around it several times and from there taken to the corner posts, thus winding the thread several times crosswise around the marriage booth. The *dosi* or *dewar* pretends that he wants to tear the thread. There is a slight tussle when the others prevent him from doing so. The whole structure of the wedding booth is built of branches and leaves of the fig tree. But if no tree of this kind can be found near the village, another tree, a mango tree for instance, serves the purpose equally well.

After the work is finished, the men have a drink which is



called *marwana daru*, the liquor of the wedding booth. A similar wedding booth is erected with equal solemnity at the home of the bride, only a day later. Usually the wedding booth is built on a Sunday for the bridegroom, and on the following Monday for the bride.

### *The Anointing with Turmeric*

On the evening of the same day, the bridegroom first gets a meal. As he may not use his hands, he must be fed by some men in the house. His bride is being fed in like manner by some women at her home. Wheat cakes (*sohari*) or *kodai godala* baked in oil are fed to the groom; the last cake is always offered by the *suasa*. The bridegroom pays each of his servers a *paisa*.

After this dinner the bridegroom is anointed with turmeric paste (*hardi*). This ceremony is called *chiksa* (anointing). First the boy is made to sit on the lap of his mother or another close relative. His personal attendants (*suasa* and *suasin*) take two mango leaves, dip them into a brass vessel (*lota*) with sesame oil (*til*) and, arms crossed, touch the toes, ankles, knees and the head of the bridegroom with the leaves. The same ceremony is performed in the house of the bride. It is also called *tel charauat*, the offering of oil.

Then the *suasa* brings a thick stalk of *chirra* or *bharwa* grass, of which in former times the arrow shafts were made. In olden times, the Bhumia indeed used a real arrow shaft for this ceremony, but now that they are not allowed to use any bows and arrows, they simply take a stalk of grass. The *suasin* joins her hands to form a cup, holding the stalks between her palms over the head of the bridegroom. The *suasa*, holding with his left hand the shaft whose lower end rests in the cupped hands of the *suasin*, pours oil on the shaft. The oil runs along the shaft and drops on the head of the bridegroom. The oil used in the ceremony should be sesame oil; only if this is not available, may *ramtila* oil be used.

After the initial anointing, a paste of turmeric, oil, *kodai* and rice is prepared. The turmeric sticks are first crushed to powder and then dissolved in water. For this anointing the bridegroom is seated in a corner of the main room. First,

his mother pours a handful of the paste on his head and rubs it gently over the face, arms and chest of her son. When the mother has done her part, the other women join in and anoint the boy's whole body. For this anointing the bridegroom is of course stripped of his clothes and wears only a short loincloth (*languti*). All the bare parts of the body are covered with the yellow paste.

According to one informant, the beginning of the anointing is performed by both parents: the mother standing in front of her son, the father behind him. While the mother anoints his face and chest, the father rubs the turmeric paste on his back. When the parents have finished, the bridegroom is led outside by his attendants and made to walk three times around the wedding post on the porch. This is called *kunwara bhauri*, the walking around the wedding post of the unmarried. After that, the mother of the bridegroom or another near relative sits down at the side of the wedding post and drawing the end of her garment (*lugra*) under her outstretched legs spreads the cloth at her right side on the ground. The boy is made to sit on her lap. Now the other women again anoint him with turmeric.

When they are ready, the *suasa* approaches the anointed boy from behind and embraces him as he is sitting with his knees drawn up to his chin and his arms held tightly at his sides. The *suasa* gently lifts up the boy and carries him into the house. The women follow, and as soon as the *suasa* has put the bridegroom on the floor, they again begin to anoint him. After a while he is led outside to walk three times around the wedding post and to be anointed once more sitting on the lap of his mother or relative. The whole ceremony is repeated for a third time.

This rite which is enacted simultaneously at the house of the bride is repeated on the following day when the wedding takes place. But on the second day, the turmeric for the anointing is dissolved not in oil but only in water. About two pounds of turmeric powder are required for the ceremonies of these repeated anointings. This ceremony is performed for the first time on the eve of the wedding day. According to some informants, only the bridegroom is anointed



on the eve of the wedding day and again on the wedding day, while the bride is anointed only on the wedding day. But these may be local differences.

While the anointing takes place, the bridegroom is attended by his *suasa* and *suasin*. These two should be of the same village, but not of the same clan or *kher* (*garh*). Nowadays the *suasa* is often the husband of the *suasin*, but in former times the *suasin* had to be a virgin.

While the anointing takes place, some women sing a song. They stay in the house during the anointing.

After the anointing, the bridegroom is dressed in old clothes. A necklace (*sutya*) and a neck-ring of silver coins (*hawal*), which ordinarily are worn only by women and girls, are hung around his neck. This is done to confuse the evil spirits. In his right hand he still holds a nut-cutter (*saruta*). This dressing-up of the bridegroom as a girl is done to deceive the evil spirits which, it is feared, want to harm the groom at this important moment; the nut-cutter which he holds in his hand is his weapon to ward off the same evil spirits. The bride, however, after her anointing, does not receive any ornaments or charms as a protection against evil spirits. She, too, is dressed in old clothes, as a good dress would get soiled, covered as she is with turmeric grease.

### *The Wedding Ceremony*

The actual wedding is celebrated on the day following the bridegroom's first anointing. It takes place in the bride's village. If, however, the bride's father is very poor, all the ceremonies may be performed at the home of the groom's father, who in this case also pays the wedding expenses.<sup>6</sup>

The wedding guests from other villages have already arrived on the previous evening, or at least early in the morning of the wedding day. They passed the time in eating

<sup>6</sup> Russell and Hiralal (1916: Vol. 3, p. 73) state that the wedding procession of the Gond usually starts from the bride's house and that the wedding is held at that of the bridegroom, in contradistinction to the non-tribal practice. This is not true of the Gond of eastern Mandla who, like the Bhumia, celebrate the wedding usually at the bride's house.

and drinking, at the expense of the groom's father, and in singing and dancing throughout the night.

In the early afternoon of the wedding day, if the bride's village is at some distance, or later, if it is quite near, the groom's party gets ready to march in procession to the bride's home. Before they start, the attendants take the bridegroom to the place on the veranda where men and women take their ablutions when prevented from going to the river for their bath. There the turmeric grease with which the groom was anointed on the previous day is rubbed off. He is then given a bath and led back into the house and dressed in clean garments.<sup>6</sup> Thus properly attired the bridegroom sits on the lap of his mother or, if the mother is dead, in the lap of another related woman who feeds him cakes baked in oil.

After that the wedding procession is formed. It is called *barat*. The party consists of the bridegroom, his male and female kinsmen<sup>7</sup> and all the caste fellows of the village. Even if bride and groom live in the same village, such a procession is formed. It leads in a roundabout way from the house of the bridegroom to that of the bride.

The wedding party is always accompanied by musicians who belong to the Dhulia caste. Sometimes the bride's father too calls musicians, though this is not exactly necessary if the man is poor. The bridegroom's party, however, may not appear without at least two musicians; one, beating the *nanagara* (two sticks), the other, beating a brass plate (*timki*). If the groom's father is wealthy, he hires a whole orchestra (*bajgari*). It consists of several drummers, a clarinetist (*sanai*), sometimes also a player of an instrument which is called *sing*. This is similar to a saxophone.

The bridegroom's party, accompanied by the shrill tunes

<sup>6</sup> But these are not his nuptial garments; for at the house of the bride the groom will be anointed once more. After this last anointing with turmeric only is he dressed in his nuptial garments which the *dosi* takes along to the bride's house.

<sup>7</sup> It is only in Maratha Districts that women accompany a marriage party. The non-tribal folk of Central India, except the Bania, do not allow their womenfolk to accompany the *barat* (Cf. Russell and Hiralal: 1916: Vol. 2, pp. 122 f.). This is another proof of the close connection between Gond and Deccan Hindu culture.



of the Dhulia musicians, proceeds at a leisurely pace to the bride's village. All walk, except the bridegroom who is carried for a short distance on the back of the *suasa*. Outside the village he is set on his feet and walks the rest of the way like the others, all the time clutching in his fist the demon-scaring nut-cutter. As soon as the village of the bride comes in sight, he is again taken on the back of the *suasa*, though he may already be a full-grown man. The *suasin* carries the *kalsa* pot on her head. The *dosi* shoulders a carrier pole to which a bamboo netting is attached. It contains at one end a basket (*sikosi*) with the wedding garments of bride and groom (unless they have already been sent ahead with the water-carrier), at the other end of the pole a basket with the wedding presents for the bride's mother and grandmother.

The nuptial garments of the bridegroom consist of a new loincloth and a long white coat (*jama*) which reaches down to his ankles. This coat is often borrowed from a neighbour who charges four annas for its loan. For headgear, the bridegroom gets a white narrow strip of cloth, from seven to ten cubits long. Contrary to the non-tribal custom, the Gond or Bhumia bridegroom does not wear a nuptial crown though otherwise his dress is the same as that of a non-tribal bridegroom. Also the custom of carrying the bridegroom part of the way may be an adaptation of a non-tribal rite: in many parts of India, the bridegroom either rides a horse when on his way to the bride, or he is carried by a man. Non-tribal folk, however, do not carry the bridegroom on the back, but on the hip.

Well ahead of the wedding party walks another man, the *bhishti*<sup>8</sup> or water-carrier. Since it is his task to cook the wedding dinner, he must be of the same caste as the bridegroom. For his service he gets a nominal fee of one and a quarter rupees. When he calls at the bride's village, he drives along a he-goat to be slaughtered for the wedding dinner, and carries also the turmeric for the bridal couple's last an-

<sup>8</sup> The *bhishti* in the proper sense of the word really belongs to the Muslim water-bearers numbering over 100,000 in Northern India. The appointment of a *bhishti* clearly proves the strong non-tribal influence on the marriage ceremonial of the Gond and Bhumia.

ointing (*lagan ki hardi*), and at least two bottles of liquor. After his arrival at the house of the bride, he locks the goat in the cattleshed, then gives the porch of the house a coating with fresh cattle dung. After this has been done he visits the houses of the village headman, the village watchman, the Brahmin, and four or five other village notables where he performs the same service. Then he goes and collects *mohlain* leaves (*pan*) from which he makes cups and platters for the wedding dinner. He also collects fuel (*nakri*). Sometimes he finds it more convenient to prepare the leaf platters before hand at home and to take also the fuel from the stack at his own house. When he returns from coating the porches of the various houses in the village with cattle dung, he first slaughters the goat, cuts up the meat and starts with the preparations for the wedding dinner. He fetches water, washes the *kodai* and begins to cook. He is kept very busy as nobody in the bride's home gives him a helping hand; on the contrary, they pretend to resent his intrusion; the women order him about, tease or scold him, complain that he is always in their way, tell him what to do and how to cook, and generally make his job more difficult than it actually ought to be. But the *bhishti* knows that the women do not really want to offend him and does not mind their teasing. His job, though, he takes very seriously, so much so that he does not take any food himself before the wedding dinner is served. It may be long past midnight when his meal is ready.

When the bridegroom's party arrives at the village of the bride, the guests do not proceed straight to the house of the bride, but stop about a furlong from it under a big shady tree. They make a seat ready under the tree for the bridegroom. Then they begin to sing and dance, while the groom sits quietly in the shade and watches the dance.

If the village council of the bride has not yet received its fee, which really should have been paid at the engagement, now is the time to pay it. A man of the bridegroom's party plays the go-between. He goes to the bride's home where guests and villagers are sitting around or dancing and informs the village elders that the bridegroom's father is now willing



to pay his dues. They reply that they expect at least ten rupees. The messenger returns to the bridegroom's father and delivers his message. The groom's father usually refuses to pay so much and asks for a reduction of the fee. After some heated discussion, the village elders reluctantly comply and reduce the fee by half. A very poor man pays even less, only about two rupees. If it is known that the bridegroom's father is a wealthy man, the village elders remain adamant and demand the full amount. In addition to this, the groom's father pays at least three rupees to the village headman, two rupees to the watchman, and makes some small gifts to other villagers. The village elders demand this fee with the explanation: 'It is a girl of our village that is getting married; you must pay for her.'

When all this has been settled, the bridegroom's party forms a group, ready to proceed to the bride's house. There, guests and villagers also get ready to meet the bridegroom's party. All the while both groups keep on dancing and singing. The two groups slowly approach each other from different directions, but stop at some distance from one another. After a while one of the bride's party says: 'Let us go and meet the bridegroom's party.' Slowly they proceed towards the tree where the bridegroom's party dances. The dance is wild and disorderly, and gradually develops into a veritable war dance. The men swing swords, axes and sticks, and sing and shout till they are hoarse. Some men who have brought their guns along shoot them off now and then to increase the general pandemonium. The women in a separate group dance with ever-increasing excitement and tempo, swinging their arms, bending low and then suddenly jerking up into an erect position. Slowly the two groups advance towards each other, retreat again, and advance once more. This dancing lasts about fifteen minutes. If the dancers get too excited and there is danger of a clash, the village elders go and spread some blankets on the ground somewhere at an equal distance between both groups. They request the dancers of both groups to deposit their weapons on the blankets.

Some men of the bride's party lash two or three bedsteads together and cover them with a cloth. The structure forms

the body of an 'elephant'. A conical basket is used for the 'elephant's' head with the trunk, while a bundle of straw serves as its tail. Two men take the whole structure on their shoulders. A brother or cousin of the bride mounts the 'elephant' and rides to the bridegroom's father. The bridegroom's father gives him a present of money, usually one rupee four annas.<sup>9</sup>

At last the two parties meet and now mix in a wild scramble. In mock fights they fall to the ground, roll about, get up again and jump around, brandishing their weapons and threatening to hit each other. It is indeed a wonder that no one gets hurt in this melee.<sup>10</sup>

In this general confusion, the *suasa* of the bridegroom quietly takes him on his back and, by-passing the dancing groups, carries him quickly to the wedding booth of the bride's house. There the bridegroom has to touch the wedding post (*sajan* or *mangrohen*). If he forgets to do it or is prevented from doing so by the women of the house, he must pay a fine of one and a quarter rupees.

The mock fight between the two parties invariably results in the 'defeat' of the bride's party. After some time a few old men step between the fighting groups and request them, unless this has already been done previously, to deposit their swords, axes and sticks on a sheet spread on the ground. Then the father of the bride embraces the father of the bridegroom, both throw some areca nuts on the weapons and shove some pieces into each other's mouths. The other men and women also embrace, exchange *pan* and areca nuts like the

<sup>9</sup> This may be a relic of an old Rajput custom: In old times the father of a Rajput bride had to present an elephant to his son-in-law as part of the dowry, but when a man could not afford a real elephant a small golden image of the animal was substituted. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, p. 420.

<sup>10</sup> Such a mock fight seems to be typical of the wedding ceremonies of the Oraon. Cf. F. A. Grignard (1909): p. 10, and S. C. Roy (1928): p. 156. In Bilaspur, certain non-tribal castes also indulge in a sham fight when the wedding parties meet. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, p. 410. This mock fight is probably a relic of the time when marriage by capture was common. As Manu calls it the *Rakshasa* form of marriage (Manu III, 3), it may be of non-Aryan origin.



two *samdhi*. It is the bridegroom's father who has to supply the areca nuts.

Now the bridegroom's father takes a bottle of liquor which he kept hanging on a string from his shoulder, and pours some liquor into a leaf-cup. He sprinkles a few drops on the weapons lying in a heap on the sheet. If there is an important man in the crowd, the bridegroom's father pours the liquor into the cupped palm of this man and, supporting his arm, assists him in sprinkling the liquor on the weapons. After this blessing of the arms, the two *samdhi* exchange drinks from the leaf-cup which has again been filled. The father of the bride also carries a bottle of liquor on a string over his shoulder. Now he pours liquor from his bottle into a cup which he raises to the mouth of his *samdhi* to drink. After they have drunk, the other men and women also have a drink.

At last the bridegroom's party is led by the villagers to a house at some distance from the bride's home. This house, called *janwasa*, has been specially prepared to accommodate the bridegroom's party. If no house is available for this purpose, the party is lodged in a cattleshed.

The bridegroom's party has to wait at the *janwasa* for about an hour. At last the *bhishti* arrives from the bride's house with a huge plate of boiled rice or *kodai* (*bhat*). All eat off leaf plates, except the bridegroom who has to fast. He gets his dinner later, together with the bride. While the guests are eating, the village headman and some village notables arrive on the scene. If the headman delays his arrival, the attendants of the bridegroom go to the village to invite him and some other men. The *suasin* carries on her head, on a pad, a brass vessel full of water. Its mouth is sealed with an earthen saucer which contains a burning oil-light. The messengers are accompanied by musicians playing lively tunes. The village headman is invited to the wedding even if he is of a different caste. When he arrives, he is offered a seat on a bedstead (*khatya*) to have a chat with the guests.

Meanwhile, the bride is being bathed behind the house and dressed up for the wedding by the *suasin* and other women of the family. She puts up a new *lagra*, her hair is combed, and all the silver ornaments which the family possesses are

hung on her. Some of the ornaments with which she is decked out are a gift of the bridegroom's father which he sent along with the nuptial garments.

After a while the bridegroom is handed a potsherd which contains maize grains. He is told to hold the potsherd over a fire and to fan it three times. If the maize—a handful of grains only—is roasted in this short time, it is considered an excellent omen; if the grains remain fresh, it is not regarded as a great misfortune. Then the grains are tied into a fold of the bridegroom's loincloth. Accompanied by his personal attendants and some women, he now has to go to three houses near the *janwasa* and to beg for grain. He gets at every house a handful of *kodo* which he adds to the maize grains. He is, however, not allowed to enter any of the houses, but must remain outside the courtyard. The grain is brought to him at the gate.

At the same time, the bride goes on a similar begging tour, accompanied by a few women who sing incessantly. As soon as the bride has returned to her house, the bridegroom's party leaves the *janwasa* and approaches the bride's house in procession. At the gate the procession stops.

Now the Bhumia perform a ceremony which is not customary among the Gond or any other tribe or caste of the district. The entourage of the bride leave the house with her and approach the gate from within. Two sheets are spread on the ground, one by the bridegroom's party, the other by the relatives of the bride. The sheets are held up by two men like two dividing curtains at a distance of about five yards. At one side the bridegroom is posted, at the other side the bride. Both face each other. The bridegroom now slips away under the sheet and runs towards the sheet held up by the bride's party. He stops before it, throws some grains over it at the bride and runs back as fast as he can to his own party, dodging under the sheet held up by his own men. The grains which he throws at the bride are the same which he had collected on his begging tour. Now the bride passes under the sheet held up by her relatives, runs towards the bridegroom and throws some grains collected by her over the sheet at him. She, too, returns quickly to her own party.



This rite is repeated twice. The third time the bridegroom, when he has thrown the grain at his bride, quickly slips under the curtain and runs after his bride who tries to escape into the house. If the bridegroom is able to reach her before she can enter the house, he puts his arms on her shoulders and leads her to his party. Often the girl is too quick for him and succeeds in entering the house where she hides in a corner. The women of the family bar the entrance into the house for the bridegroom and he must pay them four annas before they allow him to enter. Wealthy men have to pay even more, up to a rupee and four annas. When he has found his bride, the groom takes her by the shoulders and leads her to the gate of the courtyard.

If the wedding is performed in the house of the bridegroom, the bride, of course, runs to another house where she hides.

The following ceremony is now again performed by all castes of the district. When the bridegroom stands at the gate (*pharka*) of the courtyard, the bride's mother approaches with a brass vessel full of water and a brass plate. She pours water over the bare legs of the bridegroom and catches the water in the brass plate. After the mother of the bride, other women of the village and relatives perform this ablution as an expression of welcome. The bridegroom has to give a paisa to each woman. No order of precedence is observed in this ceremony. In a Bhumia wedding, the bridegroom stands at the gate with his bride, one arm around her shoulders. The women also wash the feet of the bride. In a Gond wedding, it is the *suasin* who washes the feet of the bridegroom; the bride's mother gives him milk to drink and bread to eat. This ceremony of welcome is repeated five times. The bride is not present at this reception. Gond women do not allow the bridegroom to enter the courtyard unless he pays them one and a quarter rupees. The bridegroom is then carried inside by the water-carrier and seated at the side of his bride in the wedding booth.

Then all sit down around the couple, have a drink, chat and dance, while the band plays. After about an hour the *suasa* takes the bridegroom, the *suasin* the bride, and both are carried outside into the courtyard. The mother of the

bridegroom and the mother of the bride are asked to sit down with outstretched legs, facing each other. The bridegroom is placed on the lap of his mother, the bride on the lap of hers. Then *suasa* and *suasin* spread a sheet over both, holding it in this position during the following ceremony.

Five paisa are placed on the sheet, one in each corner, the fifth in the centre. Now women again anoint bridegroom and bride with turmeric paste; they rub the grease all over the body, also over the clothes. The other women sing during the anointing just as they keep on singing during any ceremony performed at the wedding. After the anointing bride and groom are bathed by their attendants with hot and then with cold water. Now the sheet is taken off, the five copper coins on the sheet are given to the *dosi* of the bride who, meanwhile, is seated inside eating *urda* cakes. The wedding clothes of both bridegroom and bride are in his keeping. He now hands them over to their attendants and the bridegroom is dressed in the nuptial garments by the *suasa*, the bride by the *suasin*. While bride and groom are being dressed, the *dosi* of the bride or the *dewar* of the village demands a bottle of liquor. The bridegroom and bride on either side of him, he offers *hom*, pouring clarified butter (*ghee*) and incense into a small fire, and sprinkles some liquor on it. Then taking a strip of cloth, about five cubits long, he ties two areca nuts, four paisa, and a stick of turmeric in a corner of the cloth. One end of this strip of cloth is tied to the bridegroom's loin-cloth, the other end to the bride's *luga*.

The *suasa* and the *suasin* now bring water in a brass pot and wash the hands of bridegroom and bride. The bride's mother prepares a dish which is called *khichri*. It consists of *urda* lentils, rice and turmeric cooked together in salt water. The bride's mother feeds the groom, the groom's mother the bride. Both marriage partners sit side by side on a sheet or sackcloth. This is the procedure in a Gond marriage. Among the Bhumia, it is the *suasin* who serves the dish of *khichri*. Bridegroom and bride eat from the same plate; they are not fed by their respective mothers-in-law. Nor do they feed each other as is the custom among the non-tribals. After their meal they wash their hands, one woman after the other pour-



ing water over their hands. The water is not allowed to drop on the floor, but is caught in a brass plate. The bridegroom again pays a paisa to each woman for this service. Meanwhile, the village priest, drinking steadily, quietly finishes the bottle of liquor from which he has sprinkled a few drops on the fire. Then he goes outside.

While bride and groom have their first common meal, the village smith (Agaria) arrives with a bamboo tube in which several holes have been drilled. The tube is filled with turmeric powder (*hardi*), wheat flour and the flour of gram. While the turmeric powder is yellow, the wheat flour is white and the gram flour orange. The Agaria rolls the tube over the floor of the wedding booth around the wedding post and thus draws a carpet of pretty differently coloured patterns on the ground.

Now the *suasa* pours almost a *kuru* of *kodo* grains around the wedding post. After him, the parents of the bridegroom and the bride, and other people, scatter *kodo* grains on the floor around the wedding post. The village priest, standing at the door of the house, scatters rice grains all over the place. Following this either he, or the mother of the bride, leads the young couple three times around the wedding post, the *suasa* walking at the side of the bridegroom, the *suasin* at the side of the bride. The bridegroom, who sometimes wears over his turban (*pheta*) a nuptial crown (*maur* or *matuk*) after the fashion of the non-tribals, holds with his right hand the nut-cutter to his forehead, with his left hand he clutches the little finger of his bride's left hand. If the wedding takes place in the house of the bridegroom, they walk seven times around the wedding post, otherwise only three times. This walking around the post, called *bhauri*, appears to be the essential rite of the marriage. After the *bhauri*, bridegroom and bride are considered to be married. They now sit down near the wedding post on a sheet or on sackcloth spread on the floor.

Now the slab on which spices are ground (*silota*) is placed in front of the wedding post and on it a turmeric stick. A brass vessel (*lota*) full of water is placed on a brass plate (*thali* or *tathia*) in front of the bridegroom, another in front

of the bride. A big tobacco leaf is brought, with tobacco and country cigars (*biri*) on it, and also placed near the wedding post, as also a pot containing about four pints of liquor. The pot is placed on a pad made of ropes (*giri*). Two to four *mohlain* leaves are placed on the pot as spoons.

When all is ready, they sit down. The village priest (*dewar*) now sprinkles water from the brass vessel on the feet of bridegroom and bride. He takes the stick of turmeric on the *silota* between the thumb and fore-finger of his right hand, presses the turmeric with the thumb first on the wedding post and then on the foreheads of the couple between the eyes. He kisses his finger tips with a loud smack, throwing his hand out towards the couple in greeting; or he embraces both, laying his cheek against their cheek. At last he throws a rupee on each plate. This ceremony is called *tika* and is meant as a blessing. Then he takes a few paisa in his hand, swings them over the heads of the couple and gives a paisa each to the *suasa* and the *suasin*, to the village headman, the watchman, to the *dosi* and his wife, and to other prominent people among the wedding guests.

Immediately behind her husband, the wife of the *dewar* sprinkles water on the feet of the couple and, taking some turmeric powder with both her hands, touches the wedding post with them. Whereupon, crossing her arms, she puts her hands on the shoulders of bridegroom and bride, and pours the powder over them. After that she too takes a coin, swings it over the heads of the couple and throws it on the plate in front of them. She produces another copper coin, again moving it over the heads of the couple, and throws it towards the *suasa*. She repeats the ceremony of throwing a paisa in the following order to the *suasin*, to the *dosi*, the village headman, the watchman (*kotwar*), the musicians and the smith (*Agaria*). This ceremony is called *nijaur*. Next the *dewarin* (wife of the *dewar*, village priest) takes the head of the bridegroom between her hands and kisses her own hands with a loud smack. The same greeting is given to the bride.

Now the parents of the bride approach. The mother of the bride brings a cup of milk, or water, if no milk is available, and washes the feet of bridegroom and bride. After



her, the bride's father washes their feet. Then the mother takes a pinch of turmeric powder with two fingers, touches with it first the wedding post, then the forehead of the bridegroom and of the bride, her daughter. This rite is repeated by the bride's father. The parents of the bridegroom, however, do not bestow this blessing on the couple; this is done only by the relatives and fellow villagers of the bride. Every one, who blesses the couple in the manner just described, must put some money on the plate.

Wealthy people have to give more than just a copper coin. If the bridegroom thinks that a man or woman could have given more, he hides his feet under his loincloth and does not allow them to wash his feet. Only after the present has been increased, does he allow himself to be blessed. Sometimes the groom or the bride hide their face or look away when a wealthy but stingy man approaches them to paint their foreheads. It is considered a great dishonour if a person has to return to his place without having applied the *tika*, as this blessing is called. To escape such a dishonour, a wealthy relative may even promise the couple a calf. Such a promise is called *pun*. The calf is sent to the newly-wed couple some time after the wedding.

When all have expressed their good wishes to the couple, the father of the bride speaks the following words of blessing: '*Sona ke dant khoti, kora men putra, sar men lakshmi, kothi men dan, ganth men paisa, lakh baras jiwo!*' ('May you clean your teeth with a golden stick, may you get a son in your lap, a cow in your cattleshed, grain in your bins, money in your pocket, and may you live a hundred thousand years.')

This ceremony usually takes such a long time that the legs of the couple get cramped from squatting on the low stools (*pirha*). For this reason the *suasa* and the *suasin* once or twice help bridegroom and bride to stand up and stretch their legs. They even massage them if necessary.

Now a long sheet is spread on the floor covering the floor from the wedding post to the middle post in the main room of the house. The bride and groom, with their scarfs tied together, step on the sheet and as they are led back into the house, the bride, walking behind the groom, takes up the

sheet behind her. The bridegroom is guided by the *suasa*, the bride by the *suasin*. In the house the *dosi* unties the knot in the scarfs by which the two were tied together.

Then the bridegroom is again taken out by the *suasa*, his scarf (*pichhori*) over his head and shoulders. The bride follows in similar attire, accompanied by the *suasin*. Bridegroom and bride go from man to man and woman to woman touching their feet with folded hands. The children get a kiss from the couple.

Soon after the *bhauri* ceremony the relatives of the bride begin to serve liquor. At every wedding, dozens of bottles are emptied. Often the liquor bill at a wedding amounts to thirty or forty rupees, the price of a hundred bottles. Some people try to keep their liquor bill low by secretly distilling their own liquor and buying only a few bottles to deceive the distiller (*Kalar*). At a wedding, everybody gets a drink, men, women and even children. Before the first drink all sprinkle a few drops on the ground, but without saying a prayer. In the evening most of the wedding guests are already quite drunk. Some get very jolly and talkative, while others become quarrelsome, so that it is often difficult to prevent a fight. The young people sing and dance, while the elders look on and enjoy themselves while waiting for the wedding dinner. It consists of a huge plate of *kodai* or rice for each diner, some lentils and a small piece of goat's meat.

A wedding is an occasion of public enjoyment, a social affair, when the guests meet all their kith and kin, when public affairs are discussed and new matches arranged.

The merry entertainment continues till late in the night. But at dawn more and more guests disappear for a short nap. They either sleep at the bride's house, in the *janwasa*, or at the house of a friend or relative. Bride and bridegroom have been separated after the blessing of the guests. They do not see each other for the whole night. Next morning, when the wedding guests get ready to leave for home, the bridegroom often has some difficulty in recognizing his bride. Her girl friends dress her up as a boy or disguise her in some other manner, and the groom who has seen his spouse a few times only finds it difficult to pick her out from the crowd of girls.





I (a) A Gond, sitting on the veranda of his house



I (b) Elderly Gond, a pich-hauni over his shoulder (p. 50)

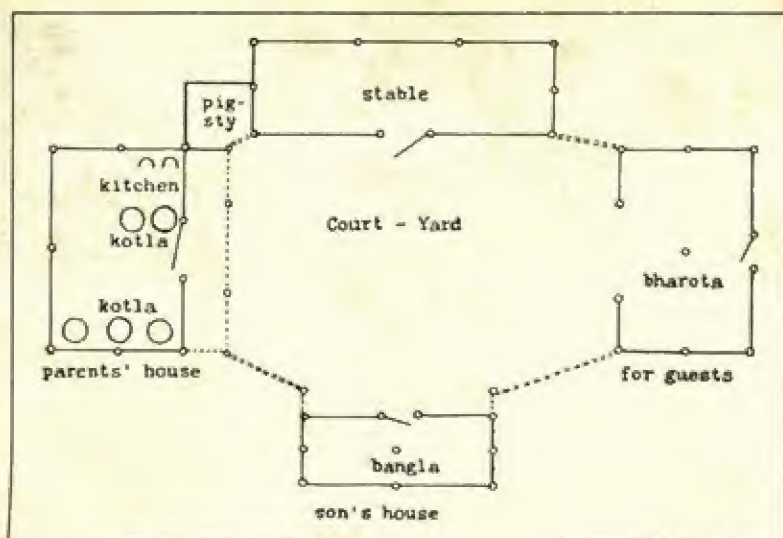


II (a) Bhumia men,  
chatting



II (b) Bhumia youth,  
drumming





III (a) Ground plan of a typical Bhumia homestead (p. 30 f.)

III (b) A grain bin (*kothi*); left, the bottommost portion; right, the upper portion in different layers (p. 34)



IV (a) A Bhumia, striking fire with steel and flint (p. 48)



IV (b) Bhumia woman, showing tattoo marks on her legs (p. 60)



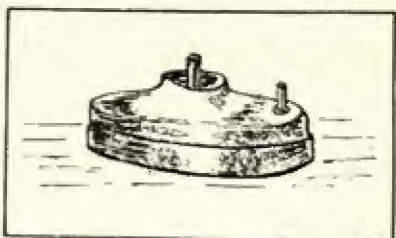


V (a) Gond woman, grinding grain on a jata handmill; note *chakkia* in front (p. 35 f.) and drawings on wall

V (b) *Jata* handmill, of clay



V (c) *Chakkia* handmill, of stone





VI (a) Bhumia woman,  
holding a rainhood (p. 46)

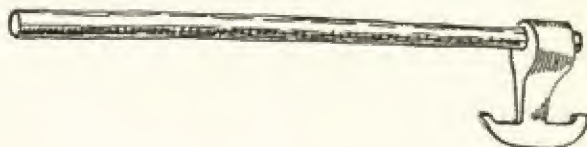
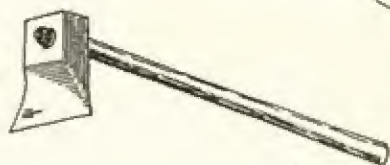


VI (b) Under the protec-  
tion of the rainhood





VII (a) Bhumia, shooting off his arrow (p. 42)



VII (b) Axes: From top to bottom: tangia, basula, and pharsa (p. 40 f.)



VIII (a) Gond woman, wearing various neck and arm ornaments



VIII (b) Gond girl, wearing a *Nagpuria hamel* (p. 58) and sitting on a *machia* (p. 40)





IX (a) Gond woman, wearing old-fashioned brass anklets (p. 59)

IX (b) A collection of silver ornaments (p. 58 f.)



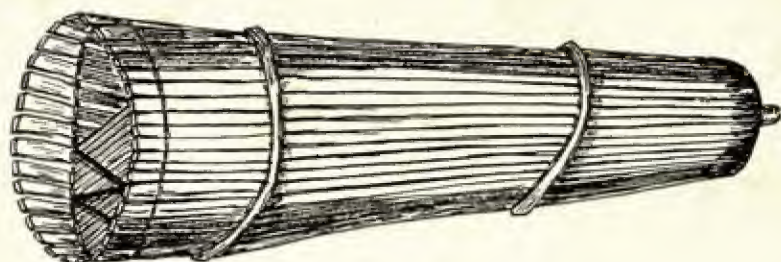


X (a) Gond farmer, leaning against his harrow (p. 87); note yoke attached to the leading beam



X (b) Gond woman, harvesting paddy





XI (a) Funnel-shaped fish trap (p. 129)

XI (b) Bhumia, drinking liquor  
from a leaf-cup (p. 74)





XII Gond woman, carrying basket;  
note *gurni*, to soften the pressure  
of the heavy basket (p. 39)





XIII (a) Drawings of horse-riders on the front-wall of a Gond house.



XIII (b) Dhulia musicians (p. 234)



XIV (a) Welcoming the bridal pair  
by washing their feet (p. 286)



XIV (b) Swastika  
(*chauk*) (p. 267)





XV (a) Funeral procession (p. 328)

Photo by: J. Lercher

XV (b) Removing the ornaments from the corpse; note hand-prints on covering sheet (p. 328)

Photo by: J. Lercher

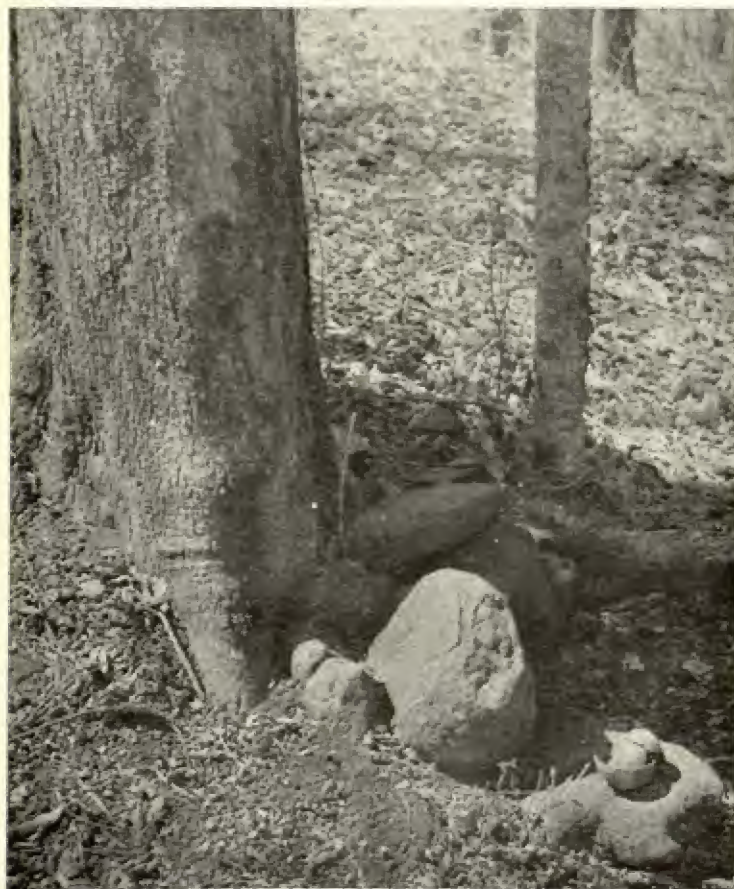




XVI (a) Adonis garden — wheat shoots grown in baskets (p. 459)

Photo by: W. Koppers

XVI (b) Stone, representing *Thakur deo*, supreme god of the Bhumia (p. 333)







XVII (a) Ghamsen and other field gods, represented in the poles on platform (p. 384)

XVII (b) Post and ladder in the courtyard of the panda (p. 463)

Photo by: W. Koppers



Photo by: W. Koppers

XVIII (a) Platform under tree, where the *bidri* ceremony is performed (p. 467)

XVIII (b) Gond *panda*, his *Marai mata* tied to a post (p. 460)



Photo by: W. Koppers





XIX (a) Bhumia, leading his  
goat to its sacrifice



XIX (b) *Marai mata* and  
*tarsul*, in the temple hut of  
the panda (p. 458)



XX (a) *Gunia*, divining  
by means of winnowing  
fan and gourd (p. 509)



XX (b) *Gunia*, divining  
by means of *chirra*  
stalks (p. 510)



If he is unable to recognize her, the girls fine him and only after he has paid them will they deliver his bride.

Before they leave, the groom wraps a brass pot (*kas ki lota*), empty or full of water, into a cloth and offers it to all the relatives and fellow villagers of his bride. This ceremony is called *dulha ka nyuta* and is the invitation of the bridegroom to follow him to his own village. Those who accept the invitation first touch the vessel and then their own forehead with their folded hands.

When the groom's party leaves for home, the bride must accompany her new spouse even if she is not yet mature. First, she takes leave of her mother by kissing her own fingers with a smack and then throwing the hand towards the face of her mother. The latter takes her daughter's head between her hands and kisses her own hands, first the right and then the left. Then mother and daughter embrace each other, laying her head on the right and then on the left shoulder of the other. This embrace is called *bhed*. The other women now take leave of the bride in the same manner. At last the bride approaches her father and her other male relatives whose feet she touches with folded hands which she then lifts to her forehead.

If the village of the bridegroom is at some distance, the party takes some provisions along for a meal, to be prepared when they stop for a rest. The journey is done on foot. The companions of the bride either mix with the companions of the groom or walk in a group of their own at some distance from the groom's party.

When they arrive at the bridegroom's home, his mother welcomes the couple at the gate by washing their feet. Then both enter the house and sit down to a meal. The groom's mother shoves some *kodai* cakes into the mouth of her son and her new daughter-in-law. Bride and groom are again brought outside to the wedding post around which they walk four times. After this ceremony all guests are liberally entertained with liquor. Later, a meal is served. They sing and dance till late at night.

On this night also the bride and groom stay in separate quarters. In the morning all get up, drink some liquor and

partake of a meal. Afterwards they dance. Somewhat later, bride and groom are again brought together. Accompanied by their attendants (*suasa* and *suasin*) they are led by the *dosi* and his wife to the village bathing place at a river or pond. The musicians, too, accompany them. At the bathing place, the *dosi* first removes all the ornaments of the bride and groom and deposits them at a safe place. Then he offers *hum* on a dry dung-cake (*kanda*) and sprinkles liquor on the ornaments and on the nuptial crown, if the couple wore one, and also on the nut-cutter of the bridegroom. Then he gives a handful of rice grains to groom and bride. The bridegroom takes off his shirt or coat and the bride rubs the lower arm of her spouse with her rice grains, while he rubs the lower arm of his bride with his rice grains. Then both step into the water and splash each other with water whereupon the *suasa* bathes the groom and the *suasin* the bride. They also wash the clothes of the couple, the *suasa* the clothes of the bridegroom and the *suasin* those of the bride. According to other informants, the bridegroom rubs the neck and back of his bride with rice grains, and the bride does the same to the groom. But everything is done with the greatest decorum, my informants insisted. This ceremony is called *marwari chārauni*, or *matuk saraun*. After the bath, all return to the house of the bridegroom. The *dosi* carries the ornaments, but the nuptial crown he leaves at the bathing place. He demands a few paisa for each ornament when he returns them to the owner. Of the money collected in this manner he gives some to the *suasa* and the *suasin*, some to the village headman and to the watchman, and a few coins to the musicians. If any money is left, he buys a bottle of liquor and gives everybody a drink.

Now the relatives and fellow villagers of the bride get ready to leave. Only if their village is far away, do they stay for another night to leave early next morning. The rest of the day they pass singing and dancing, eating and drinking and enjoying themselves. This is called *chikarmani*.

When at last the wedding guests take their leave, the bride kisses and embraces her female relatives with many tears, and greets her male relatives by touching their feet with



folded hands. She has now to stay with her husband and may visit her own relatives only occasionally and then only with her husband.

However, if the bride is still immature, she may be allowed to return to her parents' home. This is not always the case. Some young girls have to live with their husband even before puberty, especially if the husband is a grown-up man and unwilling to wait any longer for the consummation of the marriage.

The wedding post is kept on the porch of both houses for a long time after the marriage. When at last the wedding booth has to be removed, the village priest is called. He sprinkles a few drops from a bottle of liquor on the wedding post, and drinks the rest of the liquor himself. Then he pulls out the post and sticks it into the wall near the door of the hut in which the newly-married couple live.

Married life usually begins for the young couple on the same day as the wedding guests leave. The following night they sleep together for the first time in the hut which has been prepared for them. If the girl is still immature and allowed to return to her parents, married life is postponed till she comes of age. Then her husband comes with relatives and musicians to take her to his house. The guests are entertained by the girl's father with goat's meat and plenty of liquor. The fellow villagers are also invited for dinner. When the girl reaches her husband's house she is received by the women of the house who take her to the well to fetch water. It is she who prepares the meal on this day. The ceremony of fetching the wife is called *gauan*.

After about a month the relatives of the bride come again. They eat and drink in the house of the young husband's father, then early next morning leave for home with the young couple. Both stay about eight days in the house of the bride's parents. After this visit the young woman is allowed to visit her parents on the feasts of *Holi*, *Kuchlaya*, *Diwari*, *Nawa*, and on most other big feasts. Her father or brother comes to fetch the woman home. She stays a few days, then her husband comes to bring her back to his house.

It should be emphasized that the wedding ritual described

above is in its essential parts observed by all castes and tribes of eastern Mandla. Naturally, ceremonies differ from village to village, from caste to caste, but the essential rites are performed everywhere in the same manner. It must also be mentioned that the whole Gond and Bhumia wedding ceremonial is very similar to the wedding ceremonial of the non-tribals more or less all over Central India. It is, therefore, very probable that the ritual as a whole has been adopted by the Gond and Bhumia from the non-tribal castes. Had these castes adopted the wedding ritual from the Bhumia or Gond, they would not have observed it also in regions where no Gond or Bhumia are found.



## CHAPTER XV

### OTHER FORMS OF MARRIAGE

IT SHOULD be noted from the outset that all the forms of marriage described in the following pages are also found among low non-tribal castes, not only of eastern Mandla, but of the whole of Central India.

#### 1. SERVING FOR A WIFE

Marriage by service or *lamsena* is quite common among the Gond and Bhumia of eastern Mandla. Those people, especially, who have only daughters, like to take a boy into their home. He is to marry a daughter of the family, but he has to work for her. In such a case the wedding expenses are borne by the girl's father. The wedding takes place in the house of the bride, soon after she comes of age, and is usually on a more modest scale. Only the nearest relatives of the bridegroom are invited and feasted by the girl's father as they contribute nothing towards the expenses. The term of service is fixed by the village council (*panch*): it lasts among the Bhumia from five to seven, among the Gond from three to five years. The wedding should take place after about three years of service. However, in practice there is no strict rule about the period of service; and the year when the wedding takes place depends of course also on the age of the marriage partners. If there are no sons in the family, sons-in-law are often encouraged to stay on in the family; after the death of their wives' parents they inherit the whole property. But sons-in-law rarely ever stay for long in the house of their parents-in-law; generally they do not get along too well with them.

A man serving for his wife lives with the family of his future father-in-law, eats and works with him, but has a separate hut or room for sleeping. If the marriage does not

come off after the young man has already worked a couple of years, he has a right to claim restitution or another girl in marriage. If he is paid off in cash, his wages for a year amounted before the last war to about Rs. 12 only; account being taken for the fact that during his period of service he received food and clothing from his employer.

Before the marriage is performed, bride and groom are not permitted any intimacies. They are not even allowed to speak with one another; nor should they ever be alone together. Provided others are present they may work in the same place, and the girl may even bring him his food to the field.

The wedding usually takes place a year after the girl becomes mature. The couple usually leave soon after marriage to start their own household. This is almost the rule if there are sons in the house of the parents-in-law. A *lamsena*, though he does not live any more in the house, may however still continue to work in the field of his father-in-law for food and clothing.

It is a proverb that 'a *lamsena* and hired bullocks are always overworked.' A *lamsena* certainly has no easy life, though his treatment, of course, differs according to the character of the parents-in-law. Usually he is not held in high esteem. He comes from a poor family; he is often lazy or stupid. Quite frequently it happens that a *lamsena* is dismissed for laziness or under another pretext, if the girl does not want to marry him or falls in love with some other boy. The *lamsena* is thus often cheated of his wife and not seldom also of his wages. A boy serving for the purpose of marriage is supposed to work better and harder because he is expected to have a personal interest in the prosperity of his future father-in-law's family. He ought to receive higher wages than an ordinary servant, but actually he gets less when he is dismissed.

## 2. WIDOW MARRIAGE

A Gond or Bhumia woman is allowed to marry again after the death of her husband. This second marriage is not considered a marriage in the proper sense of the word, for the



woman cannot be married by *byauh* rites, but only by ceremonies which are called *hardi-pani* ('turmeric water').

After her husband's death, a woman should marry one of his kinsmen. As a matter of fact, her husband's younger brother (*dewar*) has the first right to marry her, whether he already has a wife or not. Such a union is legalised by *hardi-pani* rites. This wedding lacks the many and elaborate ceremonies which are so typical of the *byauh* marriage. However, no social stigma whatever is attached to this form of marriage which not seldom takes the place of the regular *byauh* marriage because it is so much cheaper. For the *hardi-pani* marriage, a group of relatives and fellow villagers assemble at the bride's house. Bride and groom are seated on a sheet spread on the floor on the porch (*angana*). Then they are anointed with turmeric water (*hardi-pani*). Even this anointing is rather perfunctory, for much less turmeric is used than in a regular *byauh* marriage. After the anointing, bride and groom have to stand up and both are covered with a new sheet (*pichhori*). Again turmeric water is sprinkled on them. Now the bridegroom puts a string of beads around the neck of his bride, bangles on her wrists, and a ring on her finger. They walk into the house as husband and wife. Later, a feast is given to the guests who witnessed the marriage. Much liquor is served. But a poor man often invites only a few persons for the wedding dinner and merely presents his new wife with a necklace of black beads, some bangles and a ring.

If the younger brother of the deceased husband surrenders his right over the widow, another man may marry her if she consents. But a widow if she has a number of children whom she does not want to leave, often prefers to stay single, for she must leave the children with the family of her late husband. A woman with only one or two children usually remarries. It is her husband's father or brother who arranges her remarriage. The new husband of the woman must pay the bride-price (*karchha*) to her late husband's younger brother, father or cousin.

A widow may, however, return to her own parents if the latter refund the expenses which the family of her late hus-

band incurred at her wedding. In that case her parents arrange her remarriage. If a widow has no children, she often prefers to return to her parents.

If a man leaves two wives behind, his younger brother may keep both if he so desires provided the women consent. If he forces them to stay with him against their will, they will take the first opportunity of running away. A younger brother may keep one of his deceased brother's wives and marry the other off to some other man, or he may arrange another marriage for both of them. The new husband pays him about five rupees.

### 3. MARRIAGE BY EXCHANGE

Sometimes, when a man wants to marry a certain girl, he promises his own sister in exchange for his prospective wife's brother or cousin. Often such marriages are arranged by the parents of both partners. In such a double wedding, the question of the bride-price does not arise. The expenses for the wedding are considerably reduced, as one wedding feast serves for both marriages.

This form of marriage is frequent if the children of a brother and sister get married. It is called *dudh lautana* ('returning the milk').

### 4. MARRIAGE BY CAPTURE

Marriage by capture of the bride is a legitimate form both for Gond and Bhumia. However, my Gond informant Dhuri of Bijora denied that such a marriage is possible without a previous understanding between boy and girl. Only when a boy is sure of the affection of his sweetheart, but sees no other way of gaining her, may he ask a few friends of his to go with him to the village, where the girl of his choice lives, and carry her off. When the parents of the girl become aware of the kidnapping, they at once proceed to the boy's parental house and demand the return of their daughter. Usually the relatives of the boy stoutly deny any knowledge of the whereabouts of the girl though she may be right there in the house.



Her parents at last leave under protest and with threats. After their departure, the wedding is quickly performed.

If the girl is still a virgin, i.e., had never been married before, the *byauh* marriage rites must be performed, otherwise it is a wedding by *hardi-pani*. Of the *byauh* rites only the most essential ones are performed: the so-called *chiksha*, i.e., the anointing with turmeric. A wedding booth is quickly erected and a wedding post set up, around which the pair walk seven times. Only a few people, seldom more than ten, attend the wedding. Naturally, only the nearest relatives and closest friends of the bridegroom allow themselves to be involved in such a wedding. The village elders conveniently ignore the whole affair; they do not object to it, nor do they approve of it. The boy is not punished for kidnapping the girl.

As soon as the parents of the girl are informed of the wedding, they again appear and demand a bride-price (*karchha*). The Gond demand for a virgin girl up to 500 rupees, for one not a virgin, from 200 to 300 rupees. If the money is paid at once, peace is soon restored. If the bridegroom cannot pay, he either promises to serve as a *lamsena* for four or five years or gives some other security towards future payment. If he does not show any readiness to pay the bride-price, the girl's parents appeal to the village council or go to court. If the girl's parents and their companions are strong enough, they force their daughter to return home.

Certain ceremonies in the present wedding ritual suggest that in former times marriage by capture was an accepted form among the Gond and Bhumia. Even in a regular marriage, the groom's party meets the bride's party outside the village, and a mock fight ensues with much flourishing of weapons. During this scene, the bridegroom is secretly carried into the village to the wedding booth. Later, he has to pursue the bride who tries to escape.

The last ceremony, however, could also be explained as an expression of the bride's liberty in accepting her bridegroom or in rejecting him. If she did not want to marry him, she would not allow herself to be caught by him.

## 5. MARRIAGE BY INTRUSION

It may happen that a Gond or Bhumia girl takes the initiative and simply enters the house of the man of her choice and informs him that she intends to become his wife. If the man consents, the very fact of keeping her makes the union legal. In most cases, there is some previous understanding between the man and the girl. No girl would take the risk of being turned out of the house and of thus becoming the laughing-stock of the whole village.

If the girl is already married to some other man, her lover must pay indemnity (*karchha*) to her lawful husband. Until this indemnity is paid, her husband has a right to call his faithless wife back, and he may even use force in bringing her to her senses. If he succeeds, the woman is made an outcaste for adultery; her husband must pay a fine to the caste council and give a purification dinner, the costs of which, however, must be paid by her seducer.

If the lawful husband of the woman agrees to release her for a certain sum of money, the woman is free to marry her lover by *hardi-pani* rites.

If a man is not willing to marry the woman who wants to marry him, he must, as soon as she enters his house, leave it and report the matter to one of the caste elders. These men at once call a meeting, summon the woman before their council and ask her to return to her lawful husband. Usually she obeys, full of shame that the offer of her heart was rejected.

A woman who enters the house of a man with the intention of marrying him is called *baithu* (the one who is sitting down).

## 6. MARRIAGE BY ELOPEMENT

When a yet unmarried girl elopes with a lover, whether he is a married man or not, it is recognized as a legal form of marriage by Gond and Bhumia. Such an elopement carries no censure by the caste community. The lovers who intend to settle down as husband and wife are not punished in any



way by the caste for coming together without the performance of a proper wedding. The kinsmen of the girl, however, claim the bride-price for her. Her husband has to pay it. Only when her husband has paid the price, is the *hardi-pani* ceremony performed, even if the girl was a virgin before her elopement.

### *Polygamy*

A Gond or Bhumia man may have several wives at the same time; polygyny is permitted and practised especially by wealthy men, economic reasons preventing poor men from supporting more than one wife.

A second wife is married by *hardi-pani* rites, unless she is still a virgin. If it is her first marriage, she should be married by *byauh* rites. It is, however, rare that a virgin girl is given in marriage to a man already married. The first wife is called *bihati*, because she is married with full rites. The second wife, if she too is married with full rites, may be called by the same name. A woman kept without even being married by *hardi-pani* is called *karti*.

A polygynous family is rarely very peaceful; not a few find it difficult to manage two wives. A Bhumia expressed this rather drastically: '*Ek toparia men do samp rakhna to thik nahin malum parta*' ('I do not consider it a sound arrangement to keep two snakes in one basket'). Giving a daughter in marriage to a man who has already a wife is called: '*apni beti ko sawat dena*' ('to give one's daughter as a rival to another man's wife').

A man who wants to marry a second wife must pay a higher bride-price to her relatives, for a second wife is not always in an enviable position; she is not always welcomed by the first wife, who takes her revenge by assigning her all the heavy work, by letting her feel at any opportune moment that she is an intruder. Of course, if a second wife is treated too badly, she might take her chance and elope with another man or return to her parents.

A man takes a second wife if his first wife does not bear him any sons, or because she is not able to cope with the work. It also happens that an elderly but still vigorous man

marries a young girl when his first wife has grown old and ugly. Such marriages are not always unhappy.

There is more chance for peace in a polygynous family if the wives are related. A man who thinks he can afford to marry two wives often weds two sisters at the same time, or one after the other. He must, of course, marry the elder sister first, for he is not permitted to marry an elder sister after the younger one, since she stands in a similar position to him as the mother-in-law.

A man would be allowed to marry the elder sister of his wife if she were the widow of his elder brother, as in such a case the law of levirate comes into force. Gond and Bhumia parents are not averse to giving a young daughter to the husband of their elder daughter, if he has proved himself to be a good man and affectionate husband.

### *Married Life*

Married life is, of course, deeply influenced by the joint-family system which is still the rule in the Gond and Bhumia society of eastern Mandla. A youth is socially and economically dependent on his father or elder brother long after his marriage, while his wife is subject to the elder women of the house. She must try to get along with them in peace. Their relations are not always happy; frequently rivalry and jealousy are rampant among the women of a joint-family. But a married couple has at least some privacy at night, since each individual family has a separate hut or room where to sleep. Everything else they have in common.

In a Gond or Bhumia family, the man is supposed to be the head of the family though the women in general do not show the same formal submissiveness to their husbands which non-tribal women display. Non-tribal women are accustomed to being adored by their sons almost as goddesses, and to being treated as servant-maids by their husbands. The lot of an aboriginal woman is more balanced. But she, too, should not sit on a bed in the presence of her husband, nor may she eat with him. Both Baiga and Gond observe the non-tribal rule of husband and wife eating separately. A woman serves her husband while he is eating; she eats when he has



finished, often eating what he has left in his plate. A man may not eat the remainder of his wife's meal.

Between husband and wife there is also a certain division of labour. The woman's domain is the house and all that appertains to the house. Normally, a man rarely interferes with his wife's house-work. Nor does he ever volunteer to lend a helping hand in her work. Pounding rice, grinding flour, fetching water, collecting fire-wood and vegetables, cooking, cleaning and washing up, besides nursing the baby and minding the bigger children in their work or play, are some of the duties which the Gond or Bhumia woman performs alone. She also buys any article in the market which is required for the kitchen. Only when she is unable to go to the market, will her husband provide these things for her.

A man is in charge of the work in field and stable; he looks after the implements required for his field work. It is he who buys clothes and ornaments for any member of the family. To provide the nuptial attire for his bride is also the privilege of the bridegroom. But even before marriage, a youth buys his sweetheart a hair-string, a piece of cloth or bangles, or at least a comb. It is possible that the custom of the husband buying clothes and ornaments for his wife results from these courtship usages. It may not be overlooked, however, that the same customs which prevail among the Gond and Bhumia are also found among the non-tribal castes of eastern Mandla and elsewhere.

A similar division between the sexes prevails with regard to field work. The tilling of a field, ploughing, harrowing and sowing, and in general, all heavy work is a man's task, while all the weeding and reaping is done by women. A woman is barred from any field work which requires the use of bullocks. Although she may not even yoke a bullock to the plough or harrow, she is allowed to milk cows and buffaloes, which is not the custom among the non-tribal castes.

Aboriginal propriety is quite in accord with non-tribal custom when it demands that husband and wife should be non-demonstrative when in the presence of others. An open caress or show of affection is unthinkable. Before others, they scarcely ever talk to each other. These rules of be-

haviour are somewhat relaxed when the couple are advanced in age. Wife-beating is not uncommon; but a man may not beat his wife too often lest she may run away.

### *Divorce*

According to tribal law, divorce is permissible only for a man; no Gond or Bhumia woman can obtain a divorce. She may run away and thus present her husband with a *fait accompli*, but she still remains his lawful wife and he can force her to return home. No divorce is possible unless the husband wants it or at least consents to a separation. The formal expression of his consent is generally seen in his acceptance of the indemnity which is offered to him by his successor to his wife's affection and is meant to repay him for the expenses which he incurred by marrying the woman.

The Gond as well as the Bhumia hold divorce permissible. But a divorce is not just an affair between a man and his wife, it is also the concern of the village community, the caste elders having a say in the matter. The frequency of divorce is somewhat restricted by the obligation of a woman's lover to pay a compensation to her former husband; this is called *karchha* (price) or *dawa* (medicine, compensation). It is the task of the caste elders to fix the right amount of compensation, and to see to it that it is really paid. Of late, the caste elders have lost much of their influence, with the consequence that quite a number of men marry runaway women and keep them without paying any compensation to their former husbands. Such behaviour is not approved by public opinion, but the position of the caste elders does not appear powerful enough to insist on the payment of compensation.

A typical case happened in a village south-east of Mandla just when I happened to be there. A Gond whose wife had died about five years ago, took another man's wife into his house. When the woman's husband came and demanded her return or payment of compensation, the man who kept the woman having agreed to let her return to her lawful husband refused to turn her out of his house. Her husband, he maintained, should come and take her. Her husband with only



one companion did not have the courage to enter the house and take hold of the woman. The caste elders of the village, headed by the headman, agreed that it was wrong for the man to keep another man's wife (*mal*, his property, as they said), but they did nothing to aid the lawful husband in getting his wife back. In the end the man had to leave without her.

Nowadays it happens quite frequently that the lover of a runaway woman collects a few friends and when the husband comes to claim her gets ready for a fight. If the husband's party is not strong enough to accept the challenge, they must beat a retreat without getting any compensation.

Of course, if the former husband of the woman is wealthy and influential and has many friends and relatives, he may be able to recover his wife, if he insists, or to enforce payment of indemnity. The usual amount to be paid in compensation is about a hundred rupees; somewhat more among the Gond, often less among the Bhumia. As long as the compensation is not paid, the lawful husband has a right to insist on his wife's return or to harass her new husband for compensation. A man will rarely take his wife back, once she has gone through the *hardi-pani* rites with another man, but he will not easily give up his claim for compensation.

A man, however, who sends his wife away, cannot claim any compensation from the man whom she subsequently marries. The usual procedure for a man who is tired of his wife is to treat her so badly that she runs away of her own accord. Then the man has a right to demand compensation, either from her parents, or from her new husband. If a woman returns to her parents, it is usually a sign that she does not really intend to leave her husband, but wants to warn him and to demand better treatment. Her parents call their son-in-law and give him a severe scolding. Only if he promises improvement do they send their daughter back. Usually some of his friends or some caste elders come along to offer guarantee for the better behaviour of the husband in future. If the man still wants to get rid of his wife without losing his compensation, he will continue to ill-treat her, with the result that she again runs away. If the parents insist at

last on a divorce, the man may claim indemnity. On the contrary, if he sends his wife back to her parents, he has no right to claim any compensation. The parents arrange their daughter's remarriage, and they get the bride-price (*nyau*) which the new husband pays for her.

If a man is able to recapture his runaway wife before she can perform the *hardi-pani* wedding with her lover, all is well. It is usually the task of a man's *nat* relatives to help him to recover his wife. They also pay in his name the woman's seducer five to ten rupees in order to gain his consent for the return of the woman to her lawful husband. But as soon as she returns, her husband's family is put out of caste and must give a dinner to the caste community of the village, and a goat to the *nat* relatives. The reason seems to be that when a lover readily surrenders the woman to her husband, the whole affair is treated as a case of simple adultery for which the punishment is excommunication. The woman's lover, however, is not punished by the caste unless he is actually caught having sexual intercourse with the woman. A man's treatment by the caste council of his village depends much of course on his social position. An influential or wealthy man can do much with impunity for which a poor or simple man would be punished with the full severity of the law. It is difficult to find a man to accuse a person of consequence with misbehaviour, and even if he were accused, he would most probably get away with a slight punishment.

Gond and Bhumia rarely blame the women for running away. They maintain that it is the man to whom she goes, that is guilty, for without a previous understanding and encouragement no woman would dare to elope.

### *The Formalities of Divorce*

A formal divorce is concluded in the following manner: The former husband of the woman comes with some witnesses to meet her new husband either at the latter's house or at some other place. The new husband of the woman also calls a few friends and relatives to act as witnesses of the divorce. When the amount of indemnity has been fixed—it usually amounts to about a hundred rupees—the new husband of



the woman fetches a brass pot (*lota*) full of water. He takes a tile from the roof of his house and places it on the mouth of the pot. Having cut a piece from the rope hinges of the door, or some rope ends from the rafters, he plucks some stalks from a broom. All these things are placed on the tile and a silver rupee is added. Then he pours some salt into the water.

The pot is placed between the two contestants and the new husband of the woman pays the indemnity fixed by the caste elders. Upon payment he hands the pot to the woman's former husband who returns it after a while. The brass pot thus changes hands five times. At last both men, or two other men acting as their substitutes, grip the pot with both hands, placing their thumbs on the tile. Putting pressure on the tile, they break it over the mouth of the pot and allow the rupee to fall into the water. It is taken out and someone goes to buy liquor with the money. All have a drink.

The new husband of the woman kills a goat or a chicken, and his new wife prepares a meal. The meat is served with rice and lentils. Before dinner starts, the men drink the liquor bought with the rupee on the tile. This common meal is a sign that the former husband of the woman does not bear any grudge against her or her new husband. The matter has been settled to the satisfaction of all.

The children which a woman has borne her former husband remain with him. Only a baby at the breast may she take along to her new home. The child remains with her until its tenth or twelfth year. Then it must be returned to its father, who must pay about a hundred rupees for its upkeep. If its father has died, meanwhile, the child must be returned to its uncle or cousin; they will take charge of it. Only in very rare cases may the mother be allowed to keep her child; but even in such a case it belongs to the clan of its natural father.

A divorced woman may keep all her personal property (*kamori*). But bullocks and cows which the woman received on her wedding day as a present are rarely returned. Ornaments, however, which she received as wedding presents cannot be retained by her former husband.

*Reasons for Frequency of Divorce*

About fifty per cent, according to other informants even more, of all regular (*byauh*) marriages end in divorce. This does not mean that *hardi-pani* marriages are any more stable; on the contrary, they are even more easily dissolved. Some women marry three or four times.

The easiest way nowadays of acquiring another wife is to elope with a woman to the tea-gardens of Assam. There are agents going around in eastern Mandla recruiting labourers for tea-gardens in Assam. But they accept only married men. However, they never ask whether the woman a prospective labourer brings along is his lawfully married wife or not. Thus a man can easily elope with another man's wife to Assam. When the couple returns after some years, the man has usually sufficient money to pay her former husband the necessary compensation, or he avoids paying anything by settling in a distant village.

The reasons why women nowadays so often run away from their husbands are mainly the following:

(i) Absence of free consent at the first marriage. Nowadays child marriages are tending to become more and more frequent, especially among the Gond. When the girl grows up and finds out on the consummation of the marriage that she does not like her husband, she often leaves him. This may happen the sooner, if she already has had a sex affair with a boy at home before she was sent to her lawful husband. In such a case the girl takes the earliest opportunity to elope with her lover.

(ii) Bad treatment by her husband and his family. Gond and Bhumia still live in joint-families. Though a young couple gets a separate hut to live in, much is in common with the family of the young husband's parents. Not seldom a young woman is badly treated by her mother-in-law, who also too often succeeds through her complaints in estranging the affection of her son for his wife.

(iii) Impotence of the husband. Such cases seem to be quite frequent. Impotence may be due not only to excessive sexual indulgence in young years, with one's own wife or with other women, but also to venereal diseases, now quite



common among the Gond, though less so among the Bhumia. The Assistant Medical Officer of Karanjia stated some years ago that 70 to 80 per cent of the aborigines in his area were infected with venereal diseases. The easy morals of the Gond and Bhumia, of course, favour the spread of the disease. Many women leave their husbands if they remain childless. After the birth of children, the marriage becomes more stable.

(iv) A woman sometimes leaves her husband if he takes a second wife or is found to be unfaithful to her.

(v) The comparative freedom of Gond and Bhumia women gives them ample opportunity for clandestine love affairs. Since pre-marital chastity is not highly valued and pre-marital love affairs not severely punished, it is difficult to enforce marital fidelity. Such love affairs are not infrequently carried on also after marriage. Moreover, men and women are frequently sexually excited on occasion of the *karma* dances with their obscene songs and excessive drinkings of alcohol. It is indeed for this reason that in some villages *karma* is no longer danced. It is significant that one can quite often hear the following statement: 'This and this man is a good fellow. He does not dance the *karma*.'

#### *The Opinion of Gond and Bhumia about Frequent Divorce*

Although according to tribal law the men only may divorce their wives, it is in fact usually the women who take the initiative in breaking up their marriage by elopement. When a woman elopes with another man, her lawful husband is practically compelled to divorce her. A marriage does not break up if the husband is unfaithful or associates with another woman, for he can marry her and still retain his lawful first wife. It is rare, therefore, for a man to leave his wife or to send her away. A divorce becomes necessary mainly by a woman's flight. And since the children of a couple remain invariably with the father when a separation is brought about, husbands are the main sufferers through frequency of divorce.

Bhumia and Gond men do not hesitate to call easy divorce a curse of their castes. They often speak with respect and admiration of faithful wives, wed in the proper manner, and

talk with scorn of women taken into the house after a quick *hardi-pani* wedding or without any rites. The headman of one village replied as follows to my question about what he thought of divorce: 'If we Gond did not care for our wives, why do we so often take so much effort to get them back?' In some villages the dancing of *karma* was stopped completely; though Gond and Bhumia are so fond of this dance, they forbade it because it leads to the breaking-up of marriages. Gond and Bhumia become very bitter when they think of the ill effects which divorce has on the children. If a woman forgetful of her motherly duties leaves her husband and children, the latter suffer most. There is no substitute for a mother's affection and care.

Though Gond and Bhumia realize the evil effects of frequent divorce for their communities, they do nothing to stop it. On one occasion when a girl eloped with her lover, her lawful husband went to her parents and asked them to use their good influence on the daughter and to make her return to him. The woman's parents blandly refused to help and said that they could not interfere. They stated that this was an affair of their daughter and they could do nothing. This attitude is typical of parents and caste elders, and, of course, not conducive to a check on frequent divorce.

### *Results of Frequent Divorce*

Both Gond and Bhumia agree that frequent divorce has quite disastrous effects on the economic and social life of their respective communities. But they see no possibility of a reform. To forbid divorce completely is out of question. The greatly weakened authority of the caste councils would never be able to enforce such a revolutionary change of the caste laws. They are not even able to insist on the observance of the old regulations which at least checked to some extent the frequency of divorce through the demand of a compensation. For various reasons, the authority of the caste councils is weakening everywhere, not only in eastern Mandla, among the Gond and Bhumia.

Any wedding celebration is a severe strain on the precariously balanced economic position of the aboriginals in



eastern Mandla. A man whose wife runs away incurs a lot of expense in his attempts to recover her. First he must find out her whereabouts; then he has to entertain a number of friends and relatives to assist him in the recovery of his wife. Or, if this is impossible, they must assist him in the endless parleys about the question of compensation with the party of his wife's seducer. When the compensation is at last paid, it often scarcely defrays the expenses incurred during the negotiations. Now the man must think of marrying another woman which again means heavy expenses. If, as it not infrequently happens, the second wife also elopes after some time, the man has to incur all these expenses once more. No wonder that even a wealthy man is ruined by such misfortune in his married life.

But it is the children who suffer most when their mother elopes with another man. She cannot take them along. The children remain with the father who, however, is unable to take proper care of them. Thus the children are often quite neglected, ill-fed and affection-starved. The only remedy the man can think of is a quick remarriage to give the children a new mother. Not seldom the fate of the children after a remarriage is worse than before. Step-mothers rarely care for the children by a former marriage; and if the second marriage is also blessed with children, the latter are given preference not seldom to the detriment of the step-children. This happens so often that a man on taking another wife asks a childless relative to adopt his children by a former marriage. It is often the only way to save the children from ill-treatment.

To these serious effects of divorce must be added the loss of prestige of the man whose wife elopes with another man. It often results in life-long enmity between the families of the rivals. This frequently leads to quarrels and fights, and even murder. Such inner strife does not enhance the inner solidarity of the tribal community; it leads to gradual disintegration of the tribe.

Gond and Bhumia are certainly not indifferent to these disadvantages of frequent divorce. Few men submit to a divorce without making strenuous efforts towards the reco-

very of a runaway wife. Nearly always they go at least two or three times to the self-chosen home of their former wife and urge her to return home. A man of a village near Dindori went as far as Katni, Bilaspur and Mandla, and requested the recruiting officers for labour in the tea-gardens to help him recover his wife. He did not ask for compensation, but for the return of his wife, and he spent a considerable amount of money in his efforts to locate her whereabouts.

Another man who was successful in getting his wife back made her sign a stamped paper promising that she would pay him Rs. 300 if she ever ran away again. The man, of course, had no hope of recovering so much money from any future seducer of his wife; he only wanted to frighten her into staying with him. After some time the woman again eloped. Her husband even then said that he would gladly take her back if she ever returned. Husband and wife had lived quite happily together for sixteen years.

This frequent divorce is a social stigma about which the Raj Gond are particularly sensitive. The permission of divorce in their caste considerably weakens their claim that they are high-caste Hindus. High-caste Hindus do not allow divorce. It is for this reason that leading Raj Gond around Dindori have advised their caste fellows for some years to lock their women up in the house and never to let them go out alone or after dark.



## CHAPTER XVI

### GOND AND BHUMIA IN SICKNESS

THE STATE of health of the Gond and Bhumia in eastern Mandla is not very good. There is much sickness in the villages. An occasional visit to a Bhumia hamlet at Duhania in December 1947 gave evidence of several cases of disease: two or three persons had a bad cold, one had asthma, one pneumonia, a boy had tuberculosis in an advanced state, and gonorrhoea besides. They have malaria frequently, often suffer from skin diseases, and an occasional epidemic takes a heavy toll of life in aboriginal villages. They get malaria so often that a slight attack is not even taken notice of.

To good medicines they react marvellously well and under proper care they would recover in a short time even from serious sickness.

Bhumia and Gond have their own medicines and cures which are effective enough in ordinary diseases, but with the inroad of modern civilization they also get infected with new diseases for which they have no remedies. They suffer terribly in times of epidemics and from the curses of modern civilization: tuberculosis and venereal diseases. Due to their sexual laxity, infection spreads rapidly among them.

For ordinary diseases, Gond and Bhumia know a number of jungle medicines, herbs and roots, from which they make concoctions which are often quite effective. They know a remedy for almost every disease. The knowledge of medicines is handed from father to son. When a Bhumia or Gond goes with his son to the field or into the jungle, he points out to him the plants and roots which are useful in various diseases. He also tells his son how the medicines are prepared. Some remedies, known to a few persons only, are treated as a kind of family secret, while others are known generally. One of my informants told me that he knew nothing at all of medicines; his father had died when he was still a small boy, and

consequently no one had shown him the various curative herbs and roots. For the same reason, women know very little about medicines, because nobody shows them any. The Bhumia, however, are reputed to know more about medicines than the Gond, who are less familiar with the jungle.

Though Gond and Bhumia always first apply natural remedies whenever a person falls sick, they have more faith in magic cures. They believe that sickness is caused in most cases by evil spirits or by gods who have been offended or wish to be worshipped. Accidents are also commonly attributed to such supernatural causes. It is the task of the soothsayer or magician (*gunia*) to find out which deity must be placated and what offerings are required. It is believed that magic cures are more effective than jungle medicines (*jhari buti*, from *jhari*, root, as most medicines are from roots or the bark of trees). Everything depends on the ability of the soothsayer to find the real cause of the disease. A magic cure is therefore largely a matter of the right diagnosis.

The aborigines generally have not much faith in medicines prescribed by medical science. They are strongly averse to hospitals. They prefer death to any kind of operation. However, once they get over their fear, they appreciate medicines that bring them quick relief. When they are ordered to come for inoculation in times of epidemics, they often mistake inoculation for a cure of some unknown disease, as the idea of preventive medicine is foreign to them. At Duhania, a woman came to the mission dispensary there and asked for the injection which she had received the previous year during a cholera epidemic. She said that the medicine had done her good and that she had not been sick for the whole year. Now she wanted another of these marvellous injections.

Gond and Bhumia, however, who have seen or felt the beneficent effect of proper medicines, applied by injection, have great faith in them. They come and demand an injection (*pichkari*) for any conceivable kind of disease and expect immediate relief. The knowledge of effective remedies for syphilis and gonorrhoea by way of salvarsan or penicillin injections is spreading and many aborigines come from far to get themselves injected. Nor do they mind if the treat-



ment is painful or if the medicine tastes ill, so long as it helps. They suffer stoically once they are confident that treatment will cure them.

### *Cholera*

Cholera may be said to be endemic in eastern Mandla. The disease appears every year, but in severe form usually only every fifth year. Cholera (*haizar*) begins generally towards the end of the hot season and is strongest in the first months of the monsoon. It seems to be widespread whenever the mango crop is plentiful or whenever a full flood of the Narbada River has filled the rivers with rotten fish. It appears that infection is spread largely through the river, the water of which is infected by cholera corpses only partly burned near the river side or simply thrown into the water. In the villages along the Narbada, the people draw their drinking water from the river, and eat fish which feasted on the cholera corpses. The Bhumia especially do so, as they rarely have a well from which to draw their water.

For this reason, and also because they are less clean and more undernourished, and generally more averse to taking the precaution of getting inoculated at the time of epidemics, the Bhumia are said to suffer more than all the other tribes and castes in the district. Infection spreads easily, for the aborigines take no precautions to save themselves from contamination. During a cholera epidemic one of my informants once saw a man cooking, his child eating near its mother who was lying close to the hearth, vomiting and having motions at the same time.

Precautionary measures are taken only after several persons in a house or village have died. Usually they pack their belongings and leave the village to stay for some time in the jungle, leaving the sick to their fate. But often enough they take the germs of the disease along in their clothes and sheets and get sick in the jungle.

Gond and Bhumia know of no effective natural remedy against the dreadful disease. Most patients die within five or six hours of sickness. It is believed that a patient might survive if his body can be kept warm. They thus kindle a

fire near the patient, or give him liquor to drink. They also give the patient a concoction which is supposed to keep the body warm and to restore strength in weakness. It is used also for other diseases, especially after loss of blood (after childbirth, for instance) or after a heavy diarrhoea. The concoction is prepared from the root of the *semi creeper* (beans) which grows wild in the jungle. The root is cut into small pieces and pounded for several hours to a paste. This is done at night and must be continued till morning at cock's crow. The paste is then boiled in water and given to the patient to drink. He either soon recovers or dies.

It is commonly believed that cholera is brought into the village by a certain female deity (*mata*) or by some god or evil spirit who for some reason feels offended. Cholera is not attributed to a certain deity only; it might be caused by any superhuman power. In this the Gond and Bhumia are somewhat at variance with the non-tribals who attribute cholera to a certain female deity who is known by the name of *Marai mata*, or various other names. Among the Gond and Bhumia, it is the task of the soothsayer to find its cause and to ascertain the means by which the offended deity may be placated. Only then, it is believed, will the epidemic subside.

The procedure for a reconciliatory sacrifice is usually the following: a red goat (male or female) is procured, paid for with money collected from all the villagers. This collection is called *chanda*. The goat's body is painted all over with blotches of red and other dyes, garlanded with flowers, pearls or cloth. In a solemn procession the village priest (*dewar*) then leads the goat out of the village and chases it away into the jungle with the prayer addressed to the spirit of the disease: 'Take this and leave us in peace.' Care is taken that the goat does not return to the village.

### *Plague*

Due to its inaccessibility, the eastern part of Mandla District has suffered less in former times from plague epidemics. But since the beginning of the 20th century when traffic began to increase and the district was opened to travellers, deaths



from plague increased. During the great famine of 1897, when the population was greatly weakened by starvation, plague spread quickly and took a heavy toll. Another comparatively severe attack of plague occurred in 1911; it was probably carried into Mandla District by railway passengers stopping at Nainpur station.

Since that time cases of plague occur every year here and there. Gond and Bhumia are now well aware that they can protect themselves against infection by inoculation and readily ask for it when cases of plague are reported anywhere. About ten years ago, fifteen persons died of plague in two or three villages near Duhanja. Practically all who contracted it succumbed to the disease.

### *Smallpox*

Though vaccination has done much to relieve the ravages of the disease, smallpox (*chechak*) is still quite common in eastern Mandla. The Government-appointed vaccinators tour the villages and vaccinate the children when they are a few months old. It happens sometimes, however, that a vaccinator leaves out villages far off the road, or allows himself to be bribed not to vaccinate some new-born babies, as children frequently get fever after vaccination and some even die. Around Junwani, for instance, the vaccinator is said to come only once a year. When I visited the village some years ago—it was in May—about six children were down with smallpox, eight or nine had just recovered from it, while two children had died of the disease. Obviously the village had escaped the attention of the vaccinator, as most of the children were more than a year old.

Bhumia and Gond do not have any effective remedy against smallpox. The disease is simply allowed to take its course. When the boils open, they pour ashes on them to absorb the water oozing from the boils. Smallpox might result in blindness if the puss enters the eyes.

Smallpox is believed to be caused by *Burhi mata* or *Singar mata*<sup>1</sup>, a malignant female deity. Sometimes a goat is sacri-

<sup>1</sup> In a song, recorded by Durga N. Bhagwat, the goddess of smallpox is likened to an Ojha woman (whose profession it is to apply the

ficed to the goddess, with similar rites as in the sacrifice for the avoidance of cholera. The application of medicine in smallpox is believed to be offensive to the goddess and consequently avoided. It would seem like a lack of faith, if natural remedies were applied. But in some villages after the cure is achieved, the patient must undergo a purification, and give a banquet to his caste fellows in the village.

### *Venereal Diseases*

Both gonorrhoea and syphilis, even in virulent forms, are common diseases among the Gond and Bhumia. Though the Bhumia are said to suffer less from these diseases than the Gond and the Labania, for instance, these diseases are spreading rapidly among all the aboriginal tribes of eastern Mandla, owing to their sexual laxity and to carelessness in coming in contact with infected persons. My Bhumia informant, Panga, said that in his youth—he is about sixty—only one or two in a village had contracted such a disease, but now there were at least four or five in every village. It seems that certain villages are more infected than others by these diseases. And since the physique of the aboriginals has not yet developed any resisting factors (venereal diseases are comparatively recent among them), they often suffer from more virulent forms of syphilis and gonorrhoea than those among whom these diseases have long been endemic.

The prevalence of venereal diseases among the aboriginals of eastern Mandla probably also accounts for their low birth rate. They have not increased much in numbers in the last decennies. This is the more remarkable because in other districts the aboriginal tribes show a much higher birth rate for the last twenty or thirty years.

The aboriginals maintain that these diseases 'come by themselves'. They are aware, however, that the diseases might be contracted by sexual intercourse with infected persons; they have observed that if a man suffers from a venereal disease his wife, too, is soon infected.

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tattoo marks on the body). The scars of smallpox are like the tattoo-marks on the body.



A small number of aboriginals have learnt that there is hope of a cure or at least of temporary relief by getting bismuth or quicksilver injections. The aboriginals also have their own medicines, but they find that these are not as effective as injections with bismuth, quicksilver or penicillin. Patients often walk ten to fifteen miles for injections and cheerfully pay the relatively high price of the several injections required for a cure.

### 'Fever'

The majority of deaths, the cause of which is not otherwise diagnosed, is attributed to 'fever'. The rubric 'fever' includes anything from pneumonia to wound-fever, from tuberculosis of the lungs to appendicitis and heat-stroke. Whenever the cause of death is unknown it is registered as due to 'fever'.

### *Malaria*

Indeed, fever is a very common guest in the house of the aboriginals in eastern Mandla and most often also the cause of their death. Malaria (*maura*) is very frequent in the country with its high amount of rainfall. There is much swamp land with stagnant pools where mosquito larvae are hatched in countless myriads. At night, the flooded paddy fields and pools swarm with the buzzing pests. In a country where practically every single individual is infected with malaria, there is no other protection against this disease than prevention of infection. But that is exactly what is impossible for the aboriginals. They sleep, either in the house or more often outside in the courtyard, with as little covering as decency allows. Even in the cold season they merely cover their backs, while they turn the bare chest and stomach to the fire that is kept burning throughout the night. The mosquitoes thus have ample opportunity to feast on human blood. And in having their fill, they repay their donors by injecting them with the parasite-infected fluid which produces malaria.

While people may get infected with malaria at any time of the year, they suffer much from this disease at the be-

ginning of the monsoon and mostly in the months following the rains. Only with the beginning of the cold season does the fever gradually subside. The less rainfall in the monsoons, the more malaria, say the people, for the mosquitoes need not only water but warmth to breed.

Malaria is, besides pneumonia, the chief cause of mortality during the monsoon. It is particularly dangerous to small children. When babies get malaria, they are sometimes treated in the following manner: *Neem* leaves are boiled and the sick baby bathed in the water. This is repeated for four or five days. Then the earthen pot in which the leaves were boiled is broken at cross-road. Another remedy is this: Horse-dung is collected in another village, diluted in water, and given to sick babies to drink.

Frequently, patients are simply left to suffer until the fever has burned itself out, when the blood becomes so thin that the parasites are starved and lose their virulence by quick reproduction. This is, indeed, the usual way of the fever's abeyance, but it leaves the patient utterly exhausted. In this state of prostration, the door is opened for many other diseases which the weakened system, lacking red blood corpuscles, cannot overcome.

A neglect of repeated infection with malaria may result in black-water fever which is fatal in about 80 per cent of the cases.

### *Pneumonia*

Cases of pneumonia are frequent, especially in the monsoon when the people work on their fields in the rain, and in the cold season when they sleep at night without sufficient cover. Patients usually recover after nine days. But when the fever leaves them and they feel better, they often get up and take a bath with the result that they get a relapse. This is often deadly as their heart is weakened through continuous fever and cannot stand the strain.

Pneumonia is treated like any other fever. Usually the chest of the patient is burned with a heated sickle.



*Headache*

When a Gond or Bhumia suffers from headache, he just takes a tress of hair, winds it around the finger and pulls hard. The pain of the pulling makes him forget his headache. The pulling is repeated, and sometimes the hair all over the head is pulled so forcibly that one can hear it crack.

Another common cure for headache is to burn the sides of the skull with a heated sickle. It is said that this often brings instant relief.

*Kidney and Bladder Diseases*

If a person's body begins to swell, a condition which is called *phulmi*, it is often due to a disease of the kidneys. Against this disease, they prepare a medicine of cobra flesh: a piece of the flesh of a cobra is boiled and the broth given to the patient to drink. Whenever Gond or Bhumia kill a cobra, they skin it and roast its flesh over a slow fire till it is entirely dried up. Then they store the flesh for use in kidney troubles.

*Rheumatism*

Against rheumatism, the aboriginals of eastern Mandla use a mixture of jackal's fat and the flesh of the Asaria snake. It has to be eaten fried in mustard. Better than jackal's fat is the fat of a tiger.

*Stomach-ache*

If a person feels pain in his stomach and cannot digest his food (*dhana hazam nahin hota*), a piece of the tail of an Asaria snake is cut off and the stomach of the patient is beaten with it. It is obviously a sympathetic cure, for it is held to be true that a man would wither away and die of consumption if this snake beats its tail against his leg. But in the case of stomach-ache the tail of the Asaria snake is believed to have a curative effect. (The Asaria is a non-poisonous snake.)

Another remedy against stomach-ache is to burn the belly with a heated sickle.

### *Typhoid*

Typhoid fever appears to be frequent among the Gond and Bhumia because they often draw brackish water from a pool or stream near the house. They easily get infected, especially in the monsoon when they do not like to go far for water. However, the disease does not often prove fatal, for patients do not eat when they feel a lack of appetite. As there is no one to force them to eat, their bowels get a rest and thus cure themselves. But patients succumb often through mere weakness and anaemia, as they remain without nourishment for a number of days and do not even get good food when the fever has left them and they feel better.

### *Leprosy*

The *District Gazetteer* of 1912 states that 'leprosy is very uncommon', and the Civil Surgeon adds that 'in the course of three and a half years I have seen in all about a score of lepers'. Around Duhania, lepers are still rare though they seem to be on the increase.

Lepers are not put out of caste or separated from their families so long as their sores do not grow too repulsive. If a leper becomes a burden to his relatives, they may turn him out of the house, but not for fear of infection.

In 1931, Mandla District numbered 15 to 30 lepers among 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

### *Other Skin Diseases*

Various skin diseases, itch, scabies, ringworm, etc., are very common among the aboriginals of eastern Mandla. One reason for the frequency of skin diseases is their lack of cleanliness. They do not seem to bathe as often as perhaps necessary, and for lack of change they do not wash their clothes regularly; when they do so all they use is cold water without soap. Since their clothing is scanty, their skin is more exposed to infection.

### *Wounds and Sores*

When an aboriginal cuts himself with a knife or axe, he

<sup>1</sup> *Census of India, 1931, Vol. XII, Part I, p. 212.*



stops the bleeding by covering the wound with the powdered bark of the *Sarai* tree. If no *Sarai* tree is near, the bark of *Thinsa* serves as well. Or the man simply smears fresh cow dung on the wound.

To prevent wounds from festering, the red juice found between wood and bark on the *Thinsa* tree is applied. Also the powdered bark of the *Thilwa* tree serves as a disinfectant. The fruit of the *Bhalua* tree has the same effect, and is also used as a cure. Applied on the healthy skin it produces blisters and a sore. But its effect on wounds and sores is beneficial. Diseased cattle, suffering from foot-and-mouth disease, are also treated with *Bhalua* fruits which are tied on the animal's sores.

If the sole of the foot is pierced by a thorn which cannot be removed, the skin is burned till the thick sole is pierced. Then the thorn is removed and the *Bhalua* fruit applied as a disinfectant.

Swellings are cured by burning the painful spot with a heated sickle.

### Accidents

Owing to the proximity of large wild jungle areas, deaths resulting from attacks of wild animals and from snake-bite are frequent. If a man-eating tiger roams in the district, many persons may be killed before the animal is exterminated. During the eight years, 1898 to 1905, 'when the man-eating tigers of Sakka took toll of the travellers on the Raigarh Road, the tale of deaths from wild beasts rose to the high figure of 133 in one year and 144 in another.'<sup>2</sup> These numbers apply to the whole of Mandla District, but without doubt the principal sufferers from attacks of wild animals and from snake-bite are the aboriginal Gond and Baiga; and this in spite of the fact that the latter are renowned for their good relations with, and their magic power over tigers.

Often, when a tiger or bear has mauled a person, the patient dies not of the wounds inflicted but of blood-poisoning. Some Bhumia, however, seem to know a medicine which prevents

<sup>2</sup> Mandla District Gazetteer, p. 48.

infection and even effects a cure when infection has already set in.

Deaths from snake-bite are even more frequent. Within the area of four or five villages, at least one person dies annually from snake bite. Near a dispensary or hospital patients might be saved if they receive adequate treatment in time, but in more remote villages the magician is called to cure the patient with his incantations and medicines.

In order to find out whether it was a poisonous snake that bit a person, he is given Indian pepper (*chilli* or *mirchi*), salt and *Neem* leaves. If the patient finds their taste sweet, it is a sign of poisoning.

One remedy against snake-bite is a mixture of the powdered root of the *Bharha* tree, of a shrub called *Narisa*, of the root of the *Baiganji* tree, of *bhawarmal* and *jogilatta*. The root of the *Bharha* tree is cut into small pieces and then pounded to powder. Next, the powder is wrapped into a piece of cloth and soaked in water. Then the small bag is held under the nose of the patient who breathes in its scent. Soon the poison flows out from the nose in a greenish fluid. It also trickles from the mouth. The other roots mentioned above are also cut into small pieces and pounded into powder which, diluted in water, is given to the patient to drink.

These remedies are applied three or four times a day. The wound is not treated at all, unless it begins to swell, when they apply the root of *tokra bela*. The root is rubbed on a stone and warmed over a fire and then put on the wound.

My Bhumia informant, Musra, of Bijora, said that all his caste fellows know these medicines and are able to prepare them. But it appears that they prefer to call certain men who are believed to have a lucky hand in the preparation of these medicines. Musra himself claimed to be one of them. He said that his father had taught him to prepare the medicines. His brother, too, knows how to prepare them.

The same medicines are applied for all kinds of snake bites. Though people know that not all snakes are poisonous, they seem to think that more snakes are poisonous than really are. This probably accounts for their firm conviction in the efficacy



of their snake medicines. Indeed, a number of people get well after the application of these medicines, probably not so much because they are efficacious as because the snake which bit them was not poisonous. My informants maintained that their medicines would also cure such persons as were bitten by a cobra or *karait*; but further inquiries do not bear out such assertions. In cases of cobra or *karait* bites which came to my knowledge, the medicines had proved of no avail and the persons bitten all died.

### *Murder and Suicide*

Murders in cold blood are rare in eastern Mandla, unless they are committed to stop the evil designs of a witch. Gond and Bhumia in a rage or out of jealousy, not seldom become violent and may even commit manslaughter.

Cases of suicide are more frequent. In a small area, informants could tell me several such cases which had happened in the four or five years previously. In a village near Duhania, a man hanged himself because his brother drank too much and had wasted all the property. Another man in a near village hanged himself because he had contracted syphilis. He got very repulsive wounds on his head, and in self-disgust ended his life. A third man, still young, whose father was a drunkard and whose wife had run away, went one day to his field where he shot himself. He was found five days later and had to be carried to Dindori to the court for a *post mortem*. His father had to give a caste dinner, for the bearers of the body were put out of caste when worms were found in the body. The police inspector, who had made the investigations on the spot, insisted on its removal to Dindori, in order to prove that the man had not been murdered. After the *post mortem* examination, the men wanted to carry the body back to the village, but the police objected and the corpse was subsequently burned at the Narbada River near Dindori.

Instances of woman suicides are rare; women do not seem to muster sufficient courage for a suicide. While non-tribal women frequently jump into wells to end their lives, this escape from trouble is usually not open to the aboriginal

women of eastern Mandla, because wells are rare and not deep enough.

### *Blindness*

There is a fairly great number of blind people in eastern Mandla. Blindness is due either to cataract, or to other diseases such as gonorrhea, and neglected inflammation of the eyes. For want of cleanliness many small children suffer from inflamed eyes. It appears that the magic incantations of the soothsayers are of no avail in this particular disease, *guniai na lagta*.

According to the *Census of India*, 1931, (p. 211), Mandla District had from 150 to 250 blind persons among 100,000 inhabitants.



## CHAPTER XVII

### DEATH AND FUNERAL

A PERSON seriously ill is nursed by his (or her) relatives as well as those who know how or can afford to do, as long as there is hope of a quick recovery. The usual medicines are applied; relatives and fellow villagers come and suggest other remedies which are also taken. If the ordinary medicaments do not help, a soothsayer (*gunia*) is called who in his own manner tries to find out from what disease the patient is suffering and how he can be cured. The relatives promise or perform the required offerings, even expensive ones. But when, after a protracted illness, the relatives come to the conclusion that there is not much chance for a quick recovery, they soon tire of nursing the patient. The care which a patient receives depends, of course, must on the personal character and the circumstances of his nearest relatives and on the affection which they feel for him. Generally, they take better care of patients who are young, while old persons are often neglected. It is felt that old persons who cannot work any more should get out of the way and die, and not be a burden to their relatives. They may even cause their death by deliberate neglect or by mixing poison with their food. When they get dysentery or are otherwise found troublesome, old people are given a place on the veranda, or in a small hut apart from the main house. A mat is hung up to keep them out of view; a bed is placed for them, a vessel with water and a leaf platter with gruel are placed at their side, and thus they are left to their fate. When the patients are too sick or too weak to take food and water, fowls or dogs eat and drink what remains and the patients are left to starve. Often they themselves say that it would be better for them were they to die than to live and be a burden to their relatives. Or the relatives tell them that it is better for them that they die and relieve them of the duty to care for them.

This appears to us callous and lacking in affection. However, the protracted illness of a person would seriously disturb the economic equilibrium of the rest of the family if they nursed him as they ought to do. For most of the time they live on the verge of starvation, and there is simply no surplus to fall back on in times of sickness. It may be true, as one informant told me, that they often take better care of their bullocks than of their relatives when they are sick. When a bullock gets worms in a wound, they search for a bottle and buy a disinfectant, though they may have to go far to get it. They might not do so much for a relative in a similar predicament. Again, this attitude is explicable by economic considerations: the death of a bullock is disastrous since it is often impossible to replace it. For the same reason, young people are better looked after when they get sick. At least for some longer time they are humoured and get whatever they want to eat and to drink, even if it might prove harmful to their recovery. But in the end when they lose their appetite and do not ask for food they too are neglected and left to starve.

There may be other reasons why relatives cannot take care of the sick members of the family. One of my informants told that he once saw a woman whose body was covered with worms as thick as a finger lying helplessly under a tree and crying pitifully, 'Help me, help me!' But no one paid any heed to her misery. The woman had burned herself badly and her wounds had become infected. When worms appeared in the wounds, her husband and other relatives turned her out of the house, because they would have been put out of caste had they even touched her. She was left lying under the tree and was served food and water from a distance. The woman, of course, died after much suffering.

When old people get sick, it is often the daughter-in-law who has to nurse them. It is natural that after some time she gets exasperated by so much additional work and in the end does not suppress her resentment.

Though people have a natural aversion to sickness and disease, they do not seem to be much afraid of death. Once they realize that their last hour has come, they quite resignedly accept their fate and usually die without a long agony.



Old people sometimes long for death and complain when death is tardy in calling for them. A man who has lived to a ripe age should not cling to life and be a burden to his family, but should gladly die when his time is up; that is the general idea. It explains to some extent the people's apparently callous behaviour towards sick relatives.

### 1. DEATH AND FUNERAL

When the relatives see that the patient's last hour has come, but that he is still able to swallow some food, they bring him a leaf platter with *kodai* gruel (*pej*) or curd (*dahi*) into which they drop a silver coin (a rupee, an eight-anna or four-anna piece) and a small piece of silver cut from a ring, or a piece of gold cut from a golden ear ring (*sona ki lurki*). The patient is urged to drink the gruel and with the gruel to swallow the piece of silver or gold. Sometimes the patient breathes his last in the effort at swallowing the piece of metal. The relatives make the patient swallow it so that he may have some money when he arrives in the other world. The piece of silver or gold which the patient swallows is called *samrahi* (probably from *samrath*, which means power, strength).

When the patient has swallowed the coin and the silver piece, a messenger is sent to his kinsmen and affines in other villages. It is particularly urgent that his *nat* relatives, his sister's husband and the children of his father's sisters arrive. For the eldest of the *nat* relatives has to act as master of ceremonies and has to perform certain rites after the patient's death.

When death seems imminent, the relatives appear to remember the patient again. Now only do they seem to realize the loss they are going to suffer and sincerely grieve over it. The women begin to wail and mourn, and to sing dirges, while even the men are not ashamed of showing their sorrow and of shedding some tears.

When death seems imminent, a woman of the family cleans a corner of the main room in the house, and she or a *nat* relative gives it a coating with fresh cow-dung. Meanwhile,

relatives and friends of the dying man or woman come to the house as soon as they are informed of the approaching end. The *nat* relatives lift him (or her) from the cot (*katya*) and gently place him (or her) on the floor on an old sheet spread in the corner cleaned for the purpose.

When the patient has breathed his last, a near relative closes his mouth and eyes. The body is not left lying long in the house. The members of the *nat* wash the corpse. The body is undressed for the bath, and all valuable silver ornaments are taken off. A man's body is bathed by his male relatives, a woman's body by women. After the bath, the body is covered with a sheet so that the persons making all necessary arrangements may not have to look at it. They dip their palms into a paste of sweet oil and turmeric, called *hardi tel*, and rub the mixture over body and limbs. This anointing is done by the deceased's *nat* relatives. They also dress the body afterwards in new clothes.

When everything has been carried out according to custom, the body is taken out of the house, head foremost, and placed on a bed (*katya*). If no bed is available, the men prepare a stretcher. Two long poles and five rungs are tied with bark ropes to form a bier on which bundles of grass are laid. A sheet is spread over the grass and the corpse is laid on it, with the face looking upwards. The body is covered with another cloth and fastened to the bier with strings tied crosswise over the body, to prevent it from falling off, should one of the carriers stumble on the way.

When everything is ready, the corpse is carried head foremost to the burial place. The *nat* relatives are the carriers. The funeral procession may pass through the village, if necessary, but women and children keep out of the way. They are not allowed to follow it to the place of burial or burning. Only old women sometimes go along.

When a baby dies, its father carries it away in his arms. No *nat* relatives need be called; only the nearest relatives accompany the funeral.

In the funeral procession the corpse is carried ahead, and relatives and fellow villagers follow. A son or brother of the deceased carries a smouldering dung-cake and an axe (*tangia*).



If the deceased is to be burned, the procession takes the direction to a spot near the river or pond, the so-called *marghat* of the village. If it is to be buried, the body is removed to the burial ground of which there may be several on the outskirts of the village. A cemetery is usually north of the village, the burning ground east of it.

The body of a married adult member of the Gond or Bhumia tribe is burned. This is the custom near Dindori. Only unmarried children, or persons who have met with sudden death, either by accident or by an epidemic, are buried. Persons, therefore, who have died of cholera, small-pox, snake-bite, or who have committed suicide, are buried. But a murdered person is burned with the usual rites, and the funeral banquet is given as if he had died a natural death. Lepers are also burned after death, contrary to Hindu custom. Persons killed by lightning are buried.

The following incident will shed some light on the problem of burial or burning: At one village some years ago two old men had died one after the other. The villagers were afraid to burn them because they suspected that they had died of an epidemic disease. The relatives therefore decided to bury them first in a temporary grave. In order that their bodies might be preserved from decomposition by a spirit (*bhut*), they put one and a quarter rupees into the mouth of each deceased. After some time it was found that no epidemic disease had caused their death, because no one else had fallen sick and died after them. Thus arrangements were made for the burning of the bodies. But some villagers objected and said that the bodies could not be exhumed without the permission of the police. The relatives therefore went to the police station of Shahpur and asked for permission. The police inspector sent them to Dindori to the revenue officer who, in turn, sent them to Mandla to the Deputy Commissioner, as he had no authority to allow an exhumation.

However, the prospect of going to Mandla for permission was too much for the relatives and they returned to their village. When they arrived, they heard that jackals had meanwhile dug out the bodies from their temporary graves and had half eaten them up. When the relatives wanted to

rebury the remains, their caste fellows warned them that they would have to give another funeral banquet if they touched the bodies. In order to save themselves such heavy expense, the relatives of the two old men had to desist from a reburial and to allow the jackals to finish their gruesome meal.

While the Gond and Bhumia of the northern part of Mandla usually burn their dead, those of the southern part bury them. Only prominent people are burned. This suggests that in former times burial was the rule among the Gond as well as among the Bhumia. In the villages along the Narbada River, where non-tribal influence through pilgrims and Brahmins is especially strong, both Gond and Bhumia have adopted the Hindu manner of disposing of their dead, i.e., cremation.

When the funeral procession has reached the *mar-ghat*, it circles it three times anti-clockwise. Then the bier is set down. The old men sit down for a quiet smoke, while the younger men go and collect wood for the pyre. At the bottom they place heavy logs in a square, on the top of them thinner branches and twigs. Then the body is placed on the pyre, with the feet pointing westwards. A relative of the deceased brings a new sheet, from which he tears a strip of cloth, about a foot long and three inches broad. Then he spreads the sheet on the pyre over the corpse. Thick branches and faggots are heaped on the body. Next, two close relatives of the deceased take their position at either side of the pyre. They take some *kosa* grass, measure it with an axe (*tangia*) and place it on the pyre. Then one throws his axe over the pyre at the other man standing on the other side of the pyre. The latter throws the axe back. This ceremony is repeated a second and third time, whereupon both relatives tie the strip of cloth, torn from the sheet covering the corpse, around the head of the deceased. When all the arrangements are completed, the nearest relative of the deceased, a son or brother, or for a woman her husband, is called to set fire to the pyre. The man lights some grass with the smouldering dung-cake brought from the house, with his hands crossed behind his back he approaches the pyre walking backwards and sets fire to the funeral stake at the foot of the corpse. Another close relative of the deceased lights the pyre at the head of the



corpse in the same manner. As soon as the pyre is on fire, the mourners throw on it a sickle (*hassia*), an axe (*tangia*), a bracelet (*churi*) and the string on which the deceased wore his necklace of silver coins. The sickle and axe are the emblems of his life as a farmer and jungle-dweller, the bracelet and the string of the necklace (*hawal*), the symbols of his married state, for the deceased wore them at his wedding.

If the body is to be buried, the Bhumia dig a shallow grave, only about a cubit deep; the Gond dig at least chest-deep. The deceased is buried with the head towards the south, the legs pointing towards the north. Some bury their dead with the head to the west. Gond men and women are buried lying on their back, but Bhumia women are buried face downwards.<sup>1</sup> Bhumia men are interred like Gond men lying on their back. When the corpse, with all clothes on, has been laid out in the grave, about half a pound of clarified butter and an equal quantity of *ramtila* oil are poured on its chest. For a wealthy man even more butter and oil are used. Then all the men squat around the grave and fill it with their bare hands. Afterwards they place boulders and thorns on the grave to protect it against jackals and other carrion-eating animals. At the last, a mound of big boulders is piled over the grave.

The bier or bedstead (*khatya*), on which the body had been carried to the burial ground, is broken and burned or simply thrown away. A red or black chicken is then taken to a stream (*nala*) or river near the burial ground and let loose. It soon gets killed by some animal. The burial ground is a desolate spot near a river or stream, and is believed to be haunted by an evil spirit, called *Marjekol*. This spirit may attack any one who passes the burial ground and make him sick. Any illness caused by this spirit can only be cured by

<sup>1</sup> We find a parallel to this kind of burial in the custom of Ajudhiabasi Bania (of Oudh). They, however, bury their men face downwards, and their women lying on the back. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, p. 140. The Binjhar do the same: males are buried lying on the belly (Cf. Sambalpur District Gazetteer p. 79); the Irula of Chingleput follow the same custom [Cf. E. Thurston (1909): Vol. 2, p. 386].

a soothsayer, who gently beats the patient with his bundle of *chirra* grass which he uses for divination.

After the body has been buried or burned, as the case may be, the men who carried the bier or followed it, must take a bath. The master of ceremonies, one of the *nat* relatives, steps first into the water and squats down on his haunches. Then the nearest relative of the deceased steps into the water and squats down before him. The *nat*, holding a tooth-stick in his hands, fills his cupped palms with water and pours it three times into the hands of the man facing him. He offers him the tooth-stick, a twig of any tree, and the man cleans his teeth with it. After that he is bathed by the master of ceremonies, who also washes his clothes. This ceremony is repeated for every kinsman of the deceased, even if their number is great.

If there is no river near the burial or burning ground, the ceremony is performed at a well. It is again the master of ceremonies who has to draw the water from the well.

At the same time, while all this takes place at the burial or burning ground, the women of the village assemble at the house of mourning. Soon after the body has been carried away, the women form a procession and, one walking behind the other in single file, led by the mother or wife of the deceased, proceed to the river, but to a spot at some distance from the burning or burial ground. On the way there they pick up some faggots which they give to a man squatting in their path and waiting for them to pass. He carries the fuel to the pyre and throws it on it. The women bathe while the men sit around the pyre watching it burn. The women observe the same ritual as the men when they take their bath. The women who belong to the family of the deceased are bathed by the women of their *nat* relationship.

When the pyre has burned down, the men reluctantly rise and return slowly to the village. The *nat* relatives walk ahead. The master of ceremonies walks a little apart from the other men and breaks off from a near bush a thorny branch of the *cherwa* or *bor* tree. He lays the branch across the way leading into the village and carefully places a stone on the branch so that nobody might kick it out of the way.



Then he steps over the branch and walks towards the village. The other men behind him follow his example. The meaning of this rite was unknown to my informants, but obviously it is meant to prevent the spirit of the deceased finding his way back into the village. Another explanation is that by this device the spirit which killed the deceased is prevented from returning to the village and getting another victim.

At a few yards from the house of mourning the master of ceremonies again stops and with the toes of his left foot picks up a pebble. Without bending down he lifts his foot till his hand can reach the pebble. Then, without turning round he hands it to the next man following him, who in the same manner gives the pebble to the man walking behind. Thus the pebble passes from one man to the other till the last man throws it over his shoulder backwards. The significance of this rite is not known, but it clearly expresses the wish of the survivors to break off all relations with the deceased.

When the men reach the gate leading into the courtyard, they stop. A woman comes and pours water from a small brass vessel across the entrance. Only then do the men enter and approach the house. They are received in front of the door by a woman of the house who pours water from a brass vessel over the hands of the men. After they have thus washed their hands, the master of ceremonies takes a pot with turmeric and oil, pours some oil over the head of the deceased's kinsmen and rubs their arms and legs with the oil as a token anointing. He also pours a little oil into the hands of the other men who attended the funeral. They rub it over their face, chest, arms and legs. Each man of the funeral party repeats the ceremony. But it is a rather perfunctory anointing; the number of men, from twenty to thirty, would require a lot of oil if they anointed themselves properly. While this ceremony takes place, a woman stands by with a light (*diya*) in her hand. As soon as the anointing is over, she carries the light inside and places it on a shelf in the wall. The light is kept burning.

Then the *nat* relatives of the deceased are asked for money to buy a bottle of liquor. All contribute a few coins; poor men give at least a few annas, but wealthy men give a rupee

or two. From the money collected—it amounts to about five rupees—some one buys coconuts, coarse cane sugar (*gur*) and liquor, some tobacco and country cigars.

Then the *nat* relatives of the deceased give the house of mourning a coating with fresh cattle dung. After that they bring provisions for a meal from their own house and prepare a dinner for all funeral guests. When the meal is ready, they spread several sheets on the ground and invite the guests to sit down. All caste fellows of the village are invited to this dinner. Immediately before the meal, or a little earlier, the liquor which was previously bought with the money collected from the *nat* relatives is served. According to my Bhumia informant, the liquor is taken straight from the bottle. It is not served in a leaf cup as usual. One of the *nat* relatives goes around and holds the bottle to the mouth of each man. My Gond informants, however, said that liquor is served in a leaf cup (*chaka*) and not only to men, but also to women and bigger children. The men are served by one of the male *nat* relatives, the women by female relatives. After the liquor, tobacco and cigars are distributed; those Gond who do not drink liquor are served sugar and coconut.

After all have had a drink, the nearest relative of the deceased offers one or two rupees for liquor to be served to the *nat* relatives. They also sit down and have a drink.

Now the master of ceremonies takes a piece of thin cloth and tears it into strips, which he ties around the head of each man present. The cloth must be provided by the *nat* relatives.

At last dinner is served. The master of ceremonies first goes around pouring water from a brass pot over the hands of each guest, or at least over the hands of each member of the mourning family. The water is caught up in a plate held under the hands. Then the leaf plates are served out. When all the guests have received their share of food, the master of ceremonies again makes the round. He grips the wrist of each guest and fills his hand with rice from the leaf platter before him. He helps the guest lead his hand to his mouth. Or he merely puts the hand of each guest into the plate. This signifies that no funeral guest has really any



appetite; they eat only because they are urged to eat. The kinsmen of the deceased also partake of the meal. The *nat* relatives have their dinner afterwards. All food is prepared in the house of a neighbour; it is there that the dinner is served, as the house of mourning is regarded as impure.

After this dinner, all the funeral guests return home. Only people who have come from a distant village may stay for the next ten days in case the great funeral feast is to take place then. Often, however, it is postponed to a more convenient date, after the harvest, or on the death anniversary.

On the day right after the funeral, no ceremonies whatever take place. Only the guests who are staying on must be entertained.

## 2. CEREMONIES ON THE THIRD DAY AFTER THE FUNERAL

On the third day after the funeral (*tijra*, the third day), relatives and fellow villagers again assemble at the house of mourning and ask the head of the family at what date he will be able to perform the great funeral feast. If at the moment the deceased's family cannot afford the heavy expenses of such a feast, it may be postponed to a more convenient time. But if the feast is to be held later, it will have to be on a more lavish scale. While for the banquet on the tenth day the guests are invited for only one meal, they must be entertained for three days if the feast is postponed to a later date.

If the funeral feast is to be postponed, the head of the mourning family informs the caste elders of his decision and gives them a rupee for liquor. He also invites all the men who attended the funeral for a dinner. After the meal, the master of ceremonies goes and catches or buys a fish which he cooks and serves with a dish of *kodai* to the members of the mourning family. After this meal, the kinsmen of the deceased are again allowed to eat meat. If the master of ceremonies cannot provide any fish, they must abstain from eating meat until the tenth day after the funeral.

### 3. THE FEAST ON THE TENTH DAY AFTER THE FUNERAL

According to general rule, a public caste dinner should be given on the tenth day after the funeral if the deceased was a man, or on the ninth if a woman had died. To this caste dinner all relatives and friends of the deceased as well as all the caste fellows in the village must be invited. This great funeral feast is called *kam* (the work), *kotmais* (kinship), *kriya* (work) or *din pani* (day's water). The performance of this feast is considered indispensable for the happiness of the deceased's life-spirit in the other world. It is for this reason that the Gond and Bhumia are so keen on getting a son, for naturally it is he who has to arrange this funeral feast after their death.

A day or two before the feast actually takes place, which might be any day within a year after the funeral, the *nat* relatives of the deceased come to the house of mourning and clean it thoroughly. They throw away all earthen pots, build a new fireplace, and give the whole house a coating with fresh cattle dung and white clay (*chuhi matti*). Until the house is cleaned in this manner, the members of the mourning family may not cook or take their meals in the house, for it is considered unclean.

On the morning of the funeral feast the women of the deceased's family go to the burning ground and search in the ashes for the silver coin and the piece of ring which the deceased had swallowed before his death. Whoever finds the coin or the piece of silver cut from a ring keeps it as a souvenir.

Then the *nat* relatives of the deceased go to the cremation ground. They collect the bones which were not consumed by the fire, usually the skull and the spine, and with the ashes form a pile which they cover with stones. Then all the guests proceed to the bathing place of the village. There the master of ceremonies shaves the hair of the head (except the skull lock), beard, and hair on the body of all the deceased's kinsmen. He pares their finger- and toe-nails. No one may be omitted, even if the number of kinsmen is large. After that the master of ceremonies bathes them. This



ceremony much resembles the purification of an outcaste. And indeed, before this purificatory bath is given, no one of the deceased's kinsmen may remove grain from the bins or sow his field.

If the funeral feast is postponed to a later day, this purification ceremony is performed on the third day after the funeral. The following rite is also performed on the third day, if the funeral feast cannot take place on the tenth day. While the kinsmen of the deceased are shaven and bathed, the deceased's sister's son (*bhanej*) or cousin (mother's brother's son) puts some of the deceased's bones and ashes into an earthen pot and with a few companions goes to a river or pond where he pours the contents of the pot into the water. If the funeral banquet is held later, he leaves the pot at the river or pond. If this ceremony takes place on the tenth day after the funeral, he fills the pot with water and carries the pot home. Before the dinner takes place, the guests are sprinkled with the water from the pot. The man who performs the rite gets a cow or calf, or at least one rupee four annas for this service. This ceremony is of course omitted if the deceased was buried. This rite, which is called *hathi sarana* (to make the bones float), should take place on a full moon or new moon day. But if the funeral feast is held on the tenth day after the funeral, it must be performed on this day only.

This immersion ceremony is performed in the perfunctory manner as described above, by the Bhumia only. The Gond demand a more elaborate ceremony. The nephew of the deceased (his sister's son) goes with a few companions, among whom is also the deceased's nearest kinsman, to the cremation ground. If the sister's son is too small, some other relatives take his place. Such a substitute receives a fee of two to ten rupees. The men collect two or three bones of the deceased, wrap them in a new white cloth, put them into a pot, cover the mouth of the pot with another white cloth and place the pot in the rope or bamboo netting of a carrier pole (*kawar*). They carry the pot to the Narbada River for immersion.

On the way to the river, they give some rice or *kodai* (about a pound or two) to a Brahmin or to any other man

whom they meet. When they come to the river, they put the pot down on the ground. Then the nephew of the deceased shaves first the deceased's nearest kinsmen, then his other companions whereupon he himself is shaved by one of the men. After that the nephew bathes the nearest kinsman of the deceased and washes his clothes. Together all the other men now take a bath. During the bath, the nephew takes the pot and throws the bones into the water. A paisa is also thrown away. If this immersion of the bones takes place on the day of the funeral feast, they fill the pot with water and carry it home to sprinkle it on the guests when they sit down for the dinner. Otherwise, they also throw the pot away. After the bath, the men brush their teeth, anoint the deceased's nearest kinsman with a paste of turmeric and oil, and afterwards anoint themselves. When all has been done according to custom, they dress the deceased's nearest kinsman and tie a new turban around his head. If no new headgear is available, the old turban will have to do. Then they embrace each other (*bhet-bhalai*).

The next thing is to sit down and prepare a meal. They cook rice or *kodai* and pulses (*dar*). Having partaken of this meal they return to the house of mourning. As they approach the house, the women take a brass vessel full of water, place a burning light on top of it and go to meet the men at the gate. The men sit down and the women wash their head and feet. Then follows a greeting in which the women touch the feet of the men (*charan*). At the end of the greeting, the men enter the house where they are entertained by the head of the family.

Sometimes the bones are carried off to the Narbada, but are hidden in a tree near the river. Some Gond, who are nearer to non-tribal custom carry the bones of their deceased relatives to the Ganges. To save expenses, usually a single man makes the journey. He need not walk all the way, but can use a train. On arrival at the Ganges, he throws the bones into the river, bathes, gives a rupee and four annas to a Brahmin. Then he prepares wheat cakes for himself. After the wheat cakes (*puri*) have been prepared he may also cook some rice. A pot is filled with the sacred Ganges water which



on his return the man sprinkles all over the house and on the members of the mourning family. His service is rewarded with a cash present, or with a cow or calf.<sup>2</sup>

The rites of this immersion ceremony sometimes vary in certain clans and in certain sections of the same clan. In the Maurawi clan, for instance, there is one section that is called Guraha (i.e. mound). If a member of the Guraha section dies, his *nat* relatives collect his bones and ashes in a pile after cremation. They cover the pile with stone slabs which they plaster with mud. But in the centre ('over the chest', as they say), they leave an open spot. Then in the subsequent ceremony they sprinkle some liquor on the mound, sacrifice a chicken, burn incense and clarified butter, and break a coconut. The kinsmen of the deceased are shaven by their *nat* relatives at the cremation site. After the shaving all go to the river, have a bath and wash their clothes, before they go home.

At night, one or two of the *nat* relatives again go to the cremation ground. They take a bottle of liquor along; it must be supplied by the deceased's family. They now fill up the hole in the mound which they had left open when they prepared the mound over the remains of the deceased. They pour some grain on the ground, make a chicken eat of the grain and then kill it in sacrifice. The chicken may not be sacrificed before it has picked up a few grains. After the sacrifice, they sprinkle some liquor on the mound and offer a coconut. They address the deceased in the following words: 'You were a man before. Now you are a spirit (*bhut*). Don't leave this place. Do not harm us or our cattle.'

When they return home from the cremation ground, they place a light (*diya*) in the middle of the courtyard. One of the *nat* relatives pours some flour (of rice or wheat) in a high pile and puts a few paisas in front of the light. A new basket is turned upside down over the light and the pile of flour, and on the basket is placed a brass vessel (*lota*) or an earthen pot (*ghaila*). The men go and sit down somewhere,

<sup>2</sup> This rite is customary among the Panwar Rajput, from whom the Gond may have adopted it. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, p. 348.

drink liquor and have a smoke. After some time they come back to see whether the life-spirit of the deceased has returned. This is indicated by a disturbance of the pile of flour. When this has happened, they make a chicken pick up a few grains. The flour is then poured into the brass vessel or earthen pot (*duhni*) with all the paisas. They take the flour to the garden (*bari*) and empty it on a stone slab. Having taken out the paisas and having sacrificed the chicken on the stone slab, they sprinkle liquor on the stone, burn incense and clarified butter. They ask the life-spirit of the deceased not to harass them or their cattle, while they promise to unite him with *Bara deo* in due time and to sacrifice a goat or pig on that occasion. The light, the copper coins, the basket, and the brass or earthen pot are then presented by the deceased's kinsmen to the *nat* relative who performed the ceremony. This rite is performed by the Gond as well as by the Bhumia if the deceased was cremated and not buried.

In former times, my informants said, a small hut of grass (*jhala*) was erected in the middle of the courtyard. Some women of the mourning family had to crawl in, while the *nat* relatives surrounded the hut and only allowed the women to leave the hut if they gave them some copper coins. They told me that the grass hut was erected for the deceased's spirit.<sup>3</sup> The flour and the light were placed in this hut. The basket turned over the light and flour now replaces the grass hut. After the release of the women, one of the *nat* relatives had to remove the hut. He was entitled to a present for this service. If no present was offered, the man would leave the hut in the courtyard, and none of the deceased's kinsmen could remove it.

<sup>3</sup> A similar rite is performed by the Panwar Rajput clan: 'When a man has been killed by a tiger (*bagh*), he is deified and worshipped as *Bagh Deo*. A hut is made in the yard of the house, and an image of a tiger is placed inside and worshipped on the anniversary of the man's death. The members of the household will not afterwards kill a tiger, as they think the animal has become a member of the family. A man who is bitten by a cobra (*nag*) and dies is similarly worshipped as *Nag Deo*. The image of a snake made of silver or iron is venerated, and the family will not kill a snake.' Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 4, pp. 346-7.



Another section of the Maurawi clan, called *Gai chatiya* (i.e. cow lick) does not build a mound over the bones and ashes of the deceased, but spreads about a pound of salt over them. Cattle come and with the salt lick up the ashes too, hence the name *Gai chatiya*. The salt is spread over the ashes with the express purpose that cattle may lick it up. The ashes would probably be licked up in any case, but mixed with salt this is all the more certain. This section of the Maurawi clan also performs the rite with the basket over flour and light.

The Parteti clan too has two sections; one building a mound over the remains of a deceased, and the other having the ashes licked up by cattle. These sections of the Parteti clan bear the same corresponding names of Guraha, resp. *Gai chatiya*. But the members of the Parteti clan differ in still another point from the other clans: When after the cremation of one of their clan members they have taken their bath, they may not return to the pyre to see if the whole corpse has been consumed by the flames. They are obliged to leave this service to their *nat* relatives.

If the funeral feast is held a long time after the cremation, the host must announce the exact date of the feast to the villagers and outside guests. No one may attend the feast who is not invited. But not only are relatives and caste fellows of the deceased invited, but friends from other castes are asked to honour the banquet with their presence. If such guests belong to a caste which does not accept food from Gond and Bhumia, they are given the provisions to cook for themselves.

The number of guests sometimes reaches three to four hundred. Several bags of rice or *kodai* are required to feed all guests. A wealthy man may spend thirty to forty rupees alone on drinks.

In order to make this funeral feast even more solemn, some Gond, though never yet the Bhumia, invite a Brahmin to attend it. They give him the place of honour at a spot freshly coated with a layer of cow-dung. He recites an edifying story, performs an offering and distributes the sacrificial gifts (*prashad*) among the funeral guests. The host offers the

Brahmin some money as his fee, a piece of cloth, five cubits long, and some grain or flour.

The grain for the banquet may not be taken from the grain bins by any one who attended the funeral of the deceased in whose honour the feast is celebrated. Usually a boy or girl who at the time of the funeral had been absent is requested to remove the grain from the bins and to bring it to the cooking place.

Before dinner is announced, each guest gets a cup of liquor and more if he so desires. The Gond at some places have stopped serving liquor at a funeral feast. They give as reason for this restriction the experience that in a crowd of so many people some persons are sure to get drunk and to start a fight. It is indeed a fact that many aboriginals, normally quiet and reserved, become quarrelsome and boastful when they are drunk.

As soon as the banquet is ready, drinking stops. At such a banquet *kodai* or rice is served, along with pulses and a piece of goat's meat. The meat is cut up into very small pieces, for usually a single goat has to provide meat for all the guests.

After the dinner there is some entertainment with singing and dancing. Not seldom even comic plays are staged. The Dhulia musicians have a busy day.

If the funeral feast lasts only one day, the guests take their leave soon after the meal. Otherwise they stay for three days and have a good time with plenty to eat and to drink.

Even poor people try to make the funeral feast as lavish as possible. They spend all their savings cheerfully, sell their bullocks and grain and in addition borrow money at exorbitant rates of interest. But no one should say that he had to leave the banquet with an empty stomach.

#### 4. UNITING THE DECEASED WITH BARA DEO

With the funeral feast on the tenth day after death, or later, as the case might be, the Bhumia consider their duties towards the memory of their deceased relatives fulfilled. Not so the Gond. There is a last service which the kinsmen of a



deceased must perform to put his spirit to rest. This ceremony is known by the name of *Bara deo men milana*, i.e., to unite the spirit of the deceased with *Bara deo*, the supreme god of the Gond. This ceremony should always be performed in the village of the deceased's ancestors, in his *garh*.<sup>4</sup> For an unmarried girl, the ceremony is performed in the *garh* village of her father, for a married woman in that of her husband. If the *garh* is too far away, the ceremony is performed at a nearer place. Clans which are spread over a large area have often several such places where a *garh* priest lives and has the *Bara deo* in his keeping. Clan members of a particular *garh* go to the most convenient place to put the spirit of a deceased relative to rest.

The ceremony may take place at any time after the funeral feast. The Gond of a village usually wait until several members of the same *garh* have died; then they proceed in a group to the village where the priest of their *garh* lives. A village celebrates such a feast every third or fifth year.

The Gond priest who officiates on this occasion is in charge of a stone in which the *Bara deo* of the *garh* section for which he is responsible, is supposed to abide. This priest is appointed by *Bara deo* himself. When a priest has died, a man possessed by *Bara deo* announces who in the family is to succeed him. Holding a short stick for a while between his hands, he at last knocks it on the head of the man chosen by *Bara deo* for the office of *garh* priest or *pujari* (i.e., offerer). This office is not found among the Bhumia, though they have a similar social system which, however, they call *kher*.

The ceremony of uniting the spirit of a deceased with *Bara deo* is not performed for small children, nor for people who were epileptics, or those who died of small-pox, snake-bite, jaundice, those whose bodies were swollen when they died (probably due to a disease of the heart or the kidneys), or those who were killed by a tiger or who died by lightning. And according to some informants the ceremony is not performed for persons for whom a monument known

<sup>4</sup> This custom of reburial of the bones in the ancestral village is also practised by the Munda [Cf. S. C. Roy (1912): pp. 387, 461 and 465 f.] and by the Kamar [Cf. S. C. Dube (1951): p. 116].

by the name of *gur* is erected.

The *garh* priest has his god hidden outside the village, in the jungle, or under a *saj* tree (*Terminalia tomentosa*). Sometimes the god is kept on the tree. If no *saj* tree can be found anywhere near the village, a young tree is brought from afar and planted specially for the purpose of housing the god.

The nearest relative of each deceased whose spirit is to be set at rest, searches for a reed which is called *bharwa*. It is similar to *khans* grass (*Saccharum spontaneum*), but thicker, with white flowers. He cuts off a short piece, and with a turmeric stick (*hardi*), a *paisa*, and a few stalks of *kargi* or *chirra* grass he wraps the reed into a piece of cloth. The bundle is called *kunda* (grass).<sup>5</sup> It is hidden somewhere near the tree of *Bara deo*, under a stone, in a tree or in some other place.

The Gond say that the life-spirit of the deceased is contained in the reed. The reason why it is to be united with the *Bara deo* of the *garh* is to get it out of the way. For as long as the life-spirit is not put to rest it is an evil spirit (*bhut*) and always tries to harm the surviving members of the family.

If for lack of money the ceremony of uniting the life-spirit of the deceased with *Bara deo* has to be delayed, the relatives send a soothsayer (*gunia*) to the *garh* priest of the deceased. The soothsayer addresses the spirit of the deceased and prays: 'Have patience. At present we are short of money, and have no goats, nor any rice. But as soon as we get all these things, we shall unite you with *Bara deo*. Do not harm us.'

<sup>5</sup> The Vedic Indians had a similar custom. After cremation, the bones left were hidden under a tree. After some time the bones were taken and reburied with some solemnity. If the bones could not be found where they had been hidden, *palasa* stalks were arranged in the shape of a man, wrapped in wool, anointed and reburied with the same ceremonies used in the final deposition of the real bones. Cf. A. Hillebrandt (1897): p. 92.

The custom of such symbolic reburial is widely spread among the aboriginal tribes of India, especially of southern India. The Korku and Munda also practise such a symbolic reburial; it is very common where the dead are buried and not burned. Cf. S. C. Roy (1912): p. 461; Hofmann-van Emelen (1932): Vol. 7, p. 2000.



Now, one of the men who have come along to attend the ceremony is expected to fall into a trance. He is supposed to be possessed by *Bara deo*. There can be no sacrifice until this happens. Sometimes they have to wait a long time. When at last the man falls into a trance, he is first given a bath. The bath over, he goes in search of the *kunda* of all the deceased for whom the ceremony is to be performed. As soon as he finds a bundle, he returns to the tree which houses the *Bara deo*, opens the bundle, takes out the *paisa* and the turmeric stick and places them on the stone slab under the sacred tree. The cloth and the *bharwa* reed he throws away. He goes again and searches for the next *kunda*. The relatives of the deceased make him search until the last bundle is found; for unless the man possessed by *Bara deo* finds a deceased's *kunda*, his life-spirit cannot be united with *Bara deo*.

When the last bundle has been found and opened, and the reed contained in it thrown away because the spirit in it has gone into *Bara deo*, the sacrificial animals brought along are made ready for sacrifice. Goats, pigs and fowls are offered in sacrifice; for a deceased man a he-goat, for a deceased woman a goat of either sex or a pig. If a family is mourning two deceased members, they sacrifice a goat or a pig for the one, and a cock for the other. Before each victim they place some rice grains. When the animal begins to eat, one of the *nat* relatives kills it with a quick stroke of the axe. The rice or *kodai* is placed before the victim in a brass plate (*thali*). If the animal refuses to eat, it is coaxed a while, and in the end the grains are unceremoniously stuffed into its mouth. The victims are sacrificed by the *nat* relatives of the deceased, not by the *garh* priest. The latter only sprinkles turmeric and oil on the stone slab which represents *Bara deo*, and offers a coconut and liquor to him.

After the sacrifice a meal is prepared. Rice and pulses are cooked in pots, and the meat of the victims is also cut up and boiled. The first meal is held at the place of sacrifice; the second in the house of the *garh* priest. What is left over of the meat is taken home. Guests of other castes, Bhumia and Kol for instance, are given provisions to prepare their own

meals. But they may not take anything home. Before each dinner, liquor is served.

The *garh* priest receives from each head of the mourning families two to five rupees. After paying their fee, all return home.

No women are allowed to witness this ceremony.

A deceased for whom this ceremony has been performed joins the rank of ancestors (*purkha*).<sup>6</sup> He is included in the oblation which occasionally is performed for the ancestors.

### 5. THE SOUL

According to Musra and other informants, the Bhumia distinguish in man the following elements: body, shadow, and life-spirit. Musra stated: 'The body is mortal, as anyone can see. After death, the body is buried in the earth to rot there, or is cremated on the stake. For after all, the body is only mud.' Then there is the shadow of man which never leaves him, but accompanies him wherever he goes. After death, the shadow (*chaen*) becomes an evil spirit (*Mari*, *bhut*) which remains near the spot where the corpse was buried or cremated. The precautions which the Bhumia take on their return from the cemetery or burning ground by placing a branch across the way or by throwing a pebble backwards over the shoulder are directed against the shadow of the dead. It should be prevented from following them back into the village. The Gond, on the other hand, prefer to catch the shadow of the deceased in a fish or frog and by some exorcism try to confine him permanently to their house.

In addition to body and shadow, there is in man his life-spirit which is called *jiw* or *pran*, also *hansa*. The life-spirit survives the death of a man; it is brought to *Bhagwan*. It has the shape of the man in whom it dwells, but it is small-sized, not bigger than a baby. It can leave the body in sleep. The wandering of the life-spirit is revealed to a sleeping man through dreams.

<sup>6</sup> It appears as if the Gond regarded their *Bara deo* as the repository of the life-substance of a *garh*; after death it returns to the *Bara deo* to be reborn after some time in a child of the same *garh*.



The Gond and Bhumia believe that it is *Bhagwan* who decides when the time is up for a person and he has to die. *Bhagwan* sends his messengers (*chaprassi* or *dut*) to fetch the soul to the house. My informants maintained that the *dut* were not human, but pure spirits, for they have no body.

When a person dies, his life-spirit is brought to *Bhagwan* by these messengers. About the fate of the soul in the other world, the average aboriginal seems to have only vague ideas. He does not appear to be very curious about what will happen to him after death. The sense of retribution after death for a good or bad life is apparently weakly developed, that is, as far as life after death is concerned. The Gond and Bhumia certainly believe that every action is adequately rewarded or punished, but in this life. They, therefore, are used to say when meeting with misfortune, especially when their crops fail: 'It is *Bhagwan's* work, because we are sinners.' Or if they see a bad man suffer some misfortune they say: 'It serves him right. *Bhagwan* punishes him because he has misbehaved.' But about retribution in the life after death they seem to know little. Once a man is 'united with *Bara deo*', the Gond believe that his life-spirit will stay with *Bara deo*, who will take care of him. He will give the spirit food and drink. The spirit of the deceased does not return to the world. This would exclude any belief in *karma* (automatic retribution) and *sansara* (transmigration), according to which a man's thoughts and actions in one life determine his condition in the next. When I expressly asked my Gond and Bhumia informants whether they believed in transmigration of souls, they answered in the affirmative. My Gond informants, Dhuri and Bhagal, said that the soul is reborn in a child, in a cow or fowl, just as *Parmatma* decides. It is interesting to note that when the Gond and Bhumia speak of rebirth and transmigration, they do not use the word '*Bara deo*' for god, but the non-tribal terms *Parmatma* or *Bhagwan*.

When they describe the fate of the soul after death, they use expressions which make it very likely that they derived their information from non-tribal sources. They say, for instance, that if the deceased led a bad life, especially if he was stingy and refused to give alms, his life-spirit would be badly

treated and severely manhandled by *Bhagwan's* messengers on the way to *Bhagwan's* house in Indra lok (a region somewhere beyond the earth). The soul of the deceased is beaten and roughly dragged over the ground. Halfway to *Bhagwan's* house—which is a long way off the earth—there is a pond filled with muddy water in which are many worms. The life-spirit of the deceased is thrown into this pool and there tortured for three days. After these three days are up the messengers of *Bhagwan* continue their journey. Finally, they reach a belt of fire drawn around *Bhagwan's* house. The life-spirit is thrown into the fire and has to burn in it for two and a half hours. After such punishment, the soul is removed from the fire and brought before *Bhagwan*. It is the task of the messengers to judge the state of the soul and to fix the amount of punishment which the soul deserves.

Sometimes the life-spirit or soul of a deceased is not thrown into the pond of worms, but at once sent back into the world to be reborn in a baby. In such a case, the human being in which the guilty soul is reborn is sure to get worms in a wound some day. This is a sign that the person had committed a serious crime in a former life. For this reason the patient and all who touch him are put out of caste and fined by the caste community. At Bijora a man died some years ago, literally eaten up by worms in his body. He had always been a good man. His fellow villagers could explain his evil fate only by the assumption that he must have committed a crime in a former life.

If worms appear in the wounds of small-pox patients, they are not put out of caste, because they are purified by the visit of *Burhi dai*, the goddess of small-pox. But in other cases, when a person dies of wounds in which worms are found, his family too is put out of caste and must give a caste banquet to be readmitted into the community. No one feels polluted, however, by touching a bullock or cow with worms in wounds.

The life-spirit of a bad man, it is believed, will soon be sent back into the world, after its removal from the fire. For this reason some new-born children are very dark-skinned; their life-spirits obviously entered their bodies immediately after



the escape from the fire. Thus the aborigines say when they see a dark-skinned baby: 'How is it that the baby is so black while its parents are fair? It must have been burned in *Bhagwan's* fire.'

While the life-spirit of a bad man is not allowed to stay long in *Bhagwan's* abode, the soul of a good man, wholly purified in the fire, enjoys great happiness at the palace of *Bhagwan* and gets good and ample food. It lives there in great comfort for several years. But in the end the life-spirit must again return to the earth and is reborn in a baby of the same caste and of the same sex.

This is the belief of tribal people who have been influenced by the non-tribal concepts of retribution and rebirth. The average Gond and Bhumia, however, has only a hazy knowledge about life after death. His belief in rebirth is kept alive mainly by the soothsayers (*gunia*) who pretend to know what forefather is reborn in a baby that has just been born. Commonly it is believed that a man is reborn in his grandson, and a woman in her granddaughter, but they admit of exceptions. In any case, though Gond and Bhumia may generally believe in the rebirth of their dead, they do not connect this rebirth, as non-tribals do, with retribution for the good and bad deeds of a former life. The principle of *karma* seems to be foreign to the aboriginal mind of eastern Mandla. Only such men who are better acquainted with the doctrine of Hinduism believe in *karma* and maintain that a man's fate is the result of his good or bad deeds in his previous birth.

If a baby cries overmuch and refuses to take the breast of its mother, people believe that this is because it got the wrong name. In such a case the soothsayer (*gunia*) is called by the parents for divination (*sagun*). It is his task to find out the name of the deceased who is reborn in the child.

One of my informants' brother's child, for instance, refused its mother's milk for seven consecutive days. The child's father called his brother who was a soothsayer. The man took some stalks of grass from a broom, divined and found that a merchant (*Bania*) had been reborn in the child. This *Bania* had given in his life-time a loan of four rupees to the child's father. For these four rupees he had in the course of

time gradually extorted twenty rupees. Shortly afterwards the *Bania* had died. Now in punishment for his extortion he had been reborn as the child of the man whom he had treated so badly. As soon as the soothsayer revealed the name of the merchant, the child stopped crying and took its mother's breast. It was suggested that the child should be given the merchant's name, but the parents objected. The child was born two years after the merchant's death.

The non-tribal influence appears also in the belief that a witch, after her death, is severely punished and chased away by *Bhagwan's* messengers from his house when her life-spirit emerges from the fire. A witch, therefore, is reborn at once. But the baby into which the life-spirit of a former witch enters, is destined for a bad future: during all her life she will be extremely poor and will never bear any children. A similar fate is in store for a man who practises black magic. Refusal to give alms to beggars and religious mendicants is also severely punished in the following life.

#### *The Fate of the Soul after Death*

The belief of the Bhumia and Gond about the fate of the soul after death is well illustrated in the following story, told to me by the Bhumia, Musra of Bijora:

Once there was a Gond, Bhoi by name. Bhoi's father was a great miser and never gave anything to a beggar. In the same village lived a Chamar (cobbler and tanner) who was very generous and good to the poor. One day, *Bhagwan* dressed himself up as a Brahmin and went to the house of Bhoi to ask for alms. But Bhoi's father said: 'I have nothing to give you. Go away.'

After some time, Bhoi's father was invited to a dinner in a distant village. He went there to attend the party. His son Bhoi was ploughing his field. His wife remained at home alone and was cooking *kodai* gruel. When the gruel was ready, she took it to her husband to eat. She had not gone more than fifty yards (a *jarib*), when *Bhagwan* in the appearance of a saintly beggar (*sadhu*) came towards her. He asked the woman: 'Where are you going, woman?' The wife of Bhoi replied: 'I am going to our field, Maharaj.' *Bhagwan*



then said: 'Woman, go back to your house and give me some alms.' The woman at once returned to her house, saying: 'I shall give you alms if you grant me a boon.' *Bhagwan* replied: 'Your boon shall be the gift of seeing what happens to men after their death. You will see the messengers (*dut*), the soul, and the way of the soul to *Bhagwan's* house. But do not disclose anything you see to any mortal soul. Otherwise you will die at once.' The woman replied: 'Let me see the house of *Bhagwan* and then die.' *Bhagwan* granted her request.

The woman took a winnowing fan (*supā*), filled it with gold and silver coins and on top of them poured some rice. When *Bhagwan* emptied the rice into his bag, he first took off the rice. Seeing the money at the bottom of the winnowing fan, he said: 'But this is a generous present.' He did not refuse to accept it, however, and stuffed all of it into his bag. But after he had left, he allowed the money to return to the house, where it was afterwards found in a pile on the floor.

After some time, the father of Bhoi died. The wife of Bhoi saw how *Bhagwan's* messengers came and beat and ill-treated the soul of her father-in-law, dragging him along over the rough ground. The woman exclaimed: 'My father-in-law must have been a bad man that he is treated so badly.' A few days later, the generous Chamar also died, and the woman saw how the messengers of *Bhagwan* carried his soul on their hands and gave him rice to eat. She said: 'This Chamar must have been a good man that his soul has such an easy journey to *Bhagwan's* house.' And she began to weep.

When Bhoi heard his wife crying over the death of the Chamar, he got very angry and said: 'Why do you weep over the death of the Chamar? When my father died, you did not weep!' And he abused and beat her, but his wife kept silent and did not tell him what she had seen. In the end, her husband accused her of having been in love with the Chamar. When the woman heard him say this, she said: 'Now I shall tell you what has happened. But then I shall have to die.'

Since this was a serious matter, Bhoi called four of his caste fellows in the village as witnesses. When they arrived, Bhoi entered his house and sat down on the floor, while his wife sat on his lap. Then the woman related the whole story and

said: '*Bhagwan* came one day to our house and asked for alms. I demanded a boon from him and he allowed me to see the fate of those who died. When my father-in-law died, he was beaten and badly treated by *Bhagwan's* messengers because he had been a bad man. But when the Chamar died, *Bhagwan's* messengers carried him on their hands to *Bhagwan's* house, because he was a good man. And I thought that if my father-in-law had given alms while he was still alive, he would not have been punished so severely. This is the reason why I began to cry at the death of the Chamar. I have now seen the whole way which a soul has to go in order to reach *Bhagwan's* house. And I also have seen *Bhagwan's* house. But now I am going to die.'

With these words, the woman leaned back towards the chest of her husband and her head fell on his shoulder. Bhoi caught her in his arms, but he saw that she had already expired. This is the end of the story. For there is nothing more to say after a person has died.

This is the story which Musra related to me. I took it down word for word, as he told it to me.

## 6. MONUMENTS FOR THE DEAD

### (a) *The Pole*

When an important man among the Gond has died, his son is entitled by public opinion to erect a monument to the memory of his father. Somewhere near a road, usually on a steep hill (*ghat*), the relatives of the deceased dig a hole in the stony ground. They sacrifice a red cock, pour its blood into the hole, offer a coconut and pray to the deceased: 'Stay here. All the people who have known you, when they pass this way, will put some stones in your honour, offer tobacco and pay obeisance to you.'

Then the kinsmen of the deceased set up a pole, about six inches thick and seven or eight feet high. One cubit of the pole (1½ ft.) is sunk in the ground. The point where the pole emerges from the ground, they anoint with turmeric paste. The top of the pole is flat, with a notch running all around some six inches below. They stick a trident (*tarsul*)



at the top of the pole and hang some glass and brass bangles (*churwa*), and also a white or red square piece of cloth on the pole. Then they heap boulders and stones around the base of the pole. Such a monument is called *gur*. When all this has been done, they return home. But on the way home, the son of the man in whose honour the mound with the pole was erected stops at a river and takes a bath. At home he entertains four or five elders of his village. They are served liquor and a meal.

The life-spirits of men for whom such a monument is erected are not 'united with *Bara deo*'. The Gond say: 'We will venerate you here. Therefore we need not unite you with *Bara deo*.'

This monument is erected not only in honour of the deceased and to keep his memory alive, but in honour of the deceased's son who erected it. People passing the monument add a boulder to the pile around the pole, offer some tobacco and pay obeisance. If the deceased was a well-known man, the memorial pole is soon almost buried under the heap of boulders.

This monument may be erected at any time after the funeral banquet (*kam* or *kotmais*) has been given.

#### (b) *The Platform*

Instead of the pole, some Gond clans erect a stone platform for their prominent men. The platform (*chaura*, i.e. square) is about five feet long and as broad, and about four or five feet high. The platform must be built of stones or bricks with mortar or cement, not with mud. In the platform, the kinsmen of the deceased bury a brass vessel containing four or five rupees and in wheat dough the figure of the man or woman thus to be honoured. The figure (*pinda*) is moulded by a Brahmin out of wheat flour. When the platform is ready, the Brahmin offers incense, clarified butter, a coconut and some coarse cane sugar (*gur*). At home the kinsmen of the deceased may perform the sacrifice of a chicken and sprinkle liquor. The Brahmin has no part in this latter offering.

When the platform is completed, the nearest relative of

the deceased places a huge boulder on it. At the time of the *Nawa* festival he comes and offers the ears of the first rice. Then he sprinkles some water over it, burns incense, pours milk over the boulder, and places some flowers on the platform.

A pole (*kamba*) is erected at the side of the platform.

Those Gond clans which erect a *gur* for their prominent deceased members, do not build a *chaura*, and vice versa. Another difference is that for the life-spirits of the deceased for whom a *chaura* is built the ceremony of 'uniting' them with *Bara deo* is not omitted.

While the Bhumia sometimes erect a *gur* for their prominent dead, they never build them a *chaura*.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### PRESERVATION BY MAGIC FROM MAN-EATING TIGERS

IN THE opinion of Bhumia and Gond it requires special precautionary ceremonies to protect the surviving relatives and fellow villagers of a person killed by a tiger. The Gond and Bhumia, as also other tribes and castes of eastern Mandla, consider the jungle in which the accident took place as being full of danger for the survivors, and especially for the relatives of the victim. No man dares to pass the spot where the victim was slain by the tiger, and if the kill happened on a road or path, they make a wide detour, because they believe that the tiger will make another attack, unless it is exorcised by special magic rites. This belief is not unreasonable, as man-eating tigers usually return to the spot where they made a kill. It is also true that man-eating tigers are particularly cunning and wary and it is extremely difficult to track them. Experience has taught the aborigines that it is next to impossible and extremely dangerous to hunt a man-eating tiger with their inadequate weapons. Thus they drive it away by magic rites. It is the privilege and sacred task of the Bhumia *dewar* (official village priest) to perform this rite, and the people maintain that in every case when this rite was properly performed the man-eating tiger in fact left the district and went away.

Man-eating tigers are comparatively rare; but in the course of three or four years within the circle of a few villages one or two persons are always killed or severely mauled by tigers. When a person is attacked by a tiger, his companions who happen to be near at hand may try to help him if they have axes or sticks. But often their assistance is of no avail and the tiger makes off with his victim. The witnesses of the tragedy rush home and inform the whole village of the accident, and they also call the men of neighbouring villages.

About fifty or sixty men come together. Only in such great numbers do they muster courage to proceed to the spot where the accident occurred. Shouting themselves hoarse and in great excitement, they follow the traces of blood on the track until they find the remains.

### 1. MATTI UTHANA

A near relative of the victim collects on a sheet what is left of him and carries the remains home. This can, of course, only be done if the tiger has dropped his victim and made off, frightened by the shouting men. The men are very careful not to step on the ground wet with the victim's blood. For it is believed that the tiger would attack them also if they carried the scent of the victim's blood on them. As soon as the remains of the victim have been deposited at his home, a near kinsman of the deceased goes in search of a *dewar* (village priest) or *guru* (spiritual preceptor) who is able to perform the exorcism of the man-eating tiger. Though in theory every village priest of the Bhumia is entitled to perform the ceremony, only a few know the rite and feel competent to perform it. The relative of the victim takes a bottle of liquor (*daru*) along and about three rupees. When the exorcist accepts the bottle of liquor and drinks it, it is with the quiet understanding that he is ready to perform the exorcism.

After a while the exorcist rises and goes alone to the jungle in search of a certain root which he needs in his exorcism. My informant, himself a man who could perform the exorcism, refused to reveal the name of the root used in the rite. He never shows the root to anyone nor lets anyone know where it is found.

While the exorcist is searching for his root, the kinsman of the victim returns to his home. There everything is prepared in great haste for the funeral. The mutilated body of the victim is placed on a bier constructed of bamboo or on a bedstead and carried by the victim's nearest kinsmen to the burning place (*marghat*). The fellow villagers who form the funeral party do not walk as usual behind the bier, but at



some distance on both sides of the road. This they do to ward off the tiger whom they believe to be hiding in the vicinity anxious to recover his prey.

At the burning place, they heap dry wood and faggots around and upon the body in great haste, and the nearest kinsman of the victim lights the pyre at the head and at the foot of the corpse. The men attending the funeral surround the pyre and do not leave it, contrary to the usual procedure at a cremation, until the body has caught fire and the flames at both ends of the pyre meet in the middle. No rites are performed, and everything is done in great hurry. They are convinced that the man-eating tiger is all the time watching them and if they left the body for one moment, the tiger would dive into the river to drench himself and then jump on the burning stake to snatch the body from the flames.

But after the pyre has burned down and the body is almost wholly consumed by the flames, all the men go and take a bath in the river. Only the exorcist remains at the pyre. He approaches it and secretly buries a piece of his magic root (*dawai*) at the foot and at the head of the corpse. Secretly he has also brought a bottle of liquor along from which he now pours a few drops on the roots buried in the ashes. All the while he recites some incantations (*mantra*). Everything is done with the greatest secrecy, and the exorcist takes all possible care that no one except the nearest kinsman of the victim watches his performance. After he has buried the root and poured liquor on the pieces, he himself eats some pieces of the root and drinks the rest of the liquor. He does not, as usual on other occasions, share his liquor with any one, not even with the nearest relative of the victim.

After the bath, all the men return to the house of the bereaved family. The nearest relative of the victim walks at the side of the exorcist. When they arrive at the gate leading into the courtyard, the exorcist secretly drops a piece of the root and buries it with his foot while no one is looking. As soon as the last straggling men of the funeral party have arrived, all sit down outside in the courtyard or on the porch of the house; the exorcist alone is allowed to enter the house. At the door he secretly sticks a small piece of his magic root

into a crack in the door or into the wall so carefully that no one can find it afterwards and carry it away. He drinks another bottle of liquor, while the men outside are likewise entertained with drinks.

While all the men were at the river and attended the cremation of the victim, the women cleaned the house and gave it a fresh coating with cattle dung, for the whole house became polluted through the sudden death of a member of the family.

While the men drink their liquor, they discuss among themselves the question about how much they will have to pay as fee to the exorcist for his exorcism of the man-eating tiger. At last the relatives of the victim approach some prominent man in the village to ask the exorcist how much he demands as fee for his performance. The matter is considered of great importance, for the exorcism (*matti uthana*, i.e., 'lifting of the soil') is not only performed in protection of the victim's relatives, but of his fellow villagers as well. The ceremonies just performed at the pyre were intended merely to prevent the tiger from carrying off the remains of the victim; the task of driving the man-eater from the precincts of the villages still lies ahead.

It is generally the headman of the village (*mukaddam*) who leads the negotiation about the fee; he not only asks the exorcist how much he demands but inquires from the heir of the victim how much he is able to pay. The exorcist usually demands quite an exorbitant sum, while the heir of the victim refuses to pay so much. It will be the task of the village headman to propose a compromise acceptable to both. The nearest relative of the victim usually refuses to fix the sum himself which he can pay and says: 'How can I say how much I can pay? Let four men who know me and what I possess fix the fee. I am ready to pay what they propose.' After a long discussion the exact amount is then fixed. A poor man has to give at least five *kuru* of *kodai*, a cock, and all the other provisions for a dinner, such as turmeric (*hardi*), red pepper (*mirchi*), pulses (*dar*), coarse sugar (*gur*) and so on. In addition he must put aside at least five rupees for liquor, and pay the exorcist about the same amount. A



wealthy man is, of course, charged considerably more.

After the fee of the exorcist has been fixed, the headman of the village also asks the exorcist how much he demands for the performance of another ceremony, the so-called *thor bel*, which is to take place about a year later. Even from a poor man the exorcist may expect a fee of about fifty rupees, but a wealthy man must give him even more, a bullock or buffalo.

All the while, during the discussion of these matters, the liquor bottle never ceases to go round, and the nearest relative of the victim sees to it that the exorcist drinks a lot, for he is anxious to keep him in a good mood, and thus to reduce the fee for the *thor bel* ceremony. In spite of a most generous supply of liquor, the exorcist at first always refuses to be content with a paltry fifty rupees. He reminds the villagers that they had better pay more or they will have to call another exorcist to perform the ceremony. The villagers are, of course, anxious that the man-eating tiger be exorcised as soon as possible. Often they form a small committee which discusses the matter out of the exorcist's hearing. If the nearest relative of the victim is unable to meet the demands of the exorcist, other relatives often intervene and offer a contribution towards the expenses, since they are afraid that they, too, might be attacked by the tiger; it is believed that a man-eating tiger prefers to attack the relatives of his former victims.

When at last the villagers and relatives of the victim have come to an agreement, the headman of the village approaches the exorcist who in studied indifference has remained sitting in his place of honour quietly sipping his bottle of liquor. When he is told how much the relatives of the victim are able to pay, he at last gives his consent and warns his clients to have everything ready for the *matti uthana* ceremony which is to be performed the next day.

He now rises and takes his leave. Some men readily accompany him on his way home, for he is usually a man of distinction and highly respected. They offer him some more drinks and he fills himself with liquor till he can scarcely walk home. His companions must almost carry him. They

ask him to take a good rest and to be ready for the following day's ceremony.

Early next morning the exorcist again goes into the jungle and searches for a plant which has the magic root. He cuts several pieces of the root and then proceeds to the spot where the accident took place. Not far from the spot, at an open place, the villagers are already waiting for him. Accompanied by all the men, the exorcist now approaches the spot and sits down. Five times he drinks liquor out of a leaf cup. Then he selects from the crowd a man who is known to fall easily into a trance. Such a man is called *barwa*. When the man is ready to assist in the exorcism, the *dewar* offers him liquor in the same leaf cup from which he had been drinking. The *barwa* drinks three times. Then the exorcist fills the cup again with liquor, drinks half of it himself and offers the rest to the *barwa*. He next lights his pipe, smokes, and hands the pipe to his assistant who also smokes.

The exorcist now calls the village watchman (*kotwar*) who all the while was standing at attention behind him and orders him to summon the victim's relatives to bring their gifts. They offer him his fee in cash, in grain, and in other provisions required for a banquet, and several bottles of liquor. Everything is deposited at a spot on the boundary of the village, indicated by the exorcist. The exorcist asks all the men to form a circle around the spot where the accident occurred. At about a hundred yards' distance the men form a circle, making much noise by shouting and firing off guns. At the same time the exorcist takes a long iron nail and hammers it into the tree nearest to the spot where the victim had been attacked by the tiger. Then he gives his magic root to the *barwa* and allows him to smell it. He recites some incantations. In about an hour, the *barwa* falls into a trance. It is believed that the spirit of the tiger takes possession of him, and the man indeed behaves like a tiger. He jumps, growls and roars, he walks on all fours and crouches around, just like a tiger. The exorcist scratches off some blood-soaked mud from the spot where the victim was killed and presses it into the hands of the *barwa*. As soon as the possessed *barwa* receives the blood-stained mud, he jumps up and runs



at high speed through the jungle. He jumps just like a tiger, sometimes slinking and sliding away under the bushes, then leaping quickly over open spaces, always running at high speed. The whole crowd of villagers follow him, shouting wildly: 'Kill him, kill him!' The *barwa* runs as far as the boundary of the village. There he stops under a tree. The men surround him at a respectful distance and wait for the exorcist who follows at a more dignified pace. The *barwa* trembles over the whole of his body, while the exorcist sits down at his side. The other people form a closed circle around the two main actors of the drama. A few men shoot off their guns.

Now the exorcist sternly orders the *barwa* to sit down. He gives him another of his magic roots to smell. Soon the possessed man wakes up from his trance and is again his old self. The exorcist asks him whether he feels alright. If he is well, he gives him a full cup of liquor five times. If the *barwa* feels groggy, the exorcist gives him another medicine to eat and recites a few incantations which soon put the man right. Then the exorcist takes seven long iron nails and places them on the ground. He takes a handful of *kodai*, moves it in a circle over the nails and recites some *mantra*. The handful of grain is placed on the ground near the nails. Two men bring a cock and a hen and the exorcist makes them pick some grains from the pile.

If the fowls cannot be brought to swallow a few grains, it is a sign that something has gone wrong in the performance. The exorcist recites some more incantations till at last the fowls begin to pick up the grains. As soon as the exorcist sees them eating, he wrings their necks and kills them. The blood he pours on the nails, whereupon he performs the so-called *hum* sacrifice by pouring clarified butter and *dhub* powder into a small fire. This done, he gives one of the nails to the *barwa*, who hammers it into the tree on the boundary of the village. With that the *barwa's* task is accomplished and the exorcist sends him away. He orders him to join the men sitting in a circle around the exorcist. The latter then pours more liquor on the remaining six nails, all the while reciting his incantations. He himself hammers one nail into the tree

just a little above the nail which the *barwa* had hammered into the tree, and another a little below it. Again he pours liquor on the remaining four nails. Taking the four nails he proceeds to the place where the villagers draw their water (*panghat*). There he hammers two nails into a stone on the ground, kills a cock and pours its blood on the nails, and after that some liquor, all the time reciting his *mantra*.

With this the tiger is exorcised and the village is free of all danger. All the men return to their village. The exorcist returns to his own village, taking along the two remaining nails and the two sacrificed chickens. The grateful villagers accompany him a part of the way. The exorcist walks a little apart with the *barwa*. On the spot where the exorcist's way leads off from the village path, all stop. All the gifts which had been promised to the exorcist are brought and laid before him. Thereupon the exorcist takes his share, leaving some portion for the *barwa*. The grain and the other provisions are divided equally, but of the five rupees the exorcist takes three, leaving two for the *barwa*. With the gifts both men pay for a dinner which they have to give to their caste fellows, for the exorcist as well as the *barwa* are put out of caste for touching the mud soiled with the blood of the tiger's victim. Both men have to give a caste banquet to be readmitted into their community.<sup>1</sup>

Five days later, the nearest relative of the victim visits the exorcist once more and asks him to fix the date for the *thor bel* ceremony. If the heirs of the victim can afford it, the rite is performed on the full moon day of the coming month of *Chait* (March or April) or *Pus* (December or January). If the relatives of the victim are short of money, after the

<sup>1</sup> This exorcism of the man-eating tiger, as also the following *thor bel* ceremony, is not unknown among other tribes. Russell and Hiralal state that the Kavar, an important aboriginal tribe in the hills of the Chhattisgarh Districts north of the Mahanadi, also perform it when a member of the tribe has been killed by a tiger. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, p. 398. The same rites are performed in Chotanagpur by the Munda and other tribes, and Hindu castes as well. But here the purpose of the ceremony is not to drive away the man-eating tiger, but the spirit of the person who was killed by the tiger. Cf. J. Hoffmann and A. van Emelen (1950): Vol. 2, p. 230.



heavy expenses they incurred for the funeral and the following exorcism, they ask the exorcist to postpone the *thor bel* ceremony for one or two years.

## 2. THOR BEL

When a Gond or Bhumia or, as a matter of fact, a member of any caste in eastern Mandla, is killed by a tiger, or dies of snake-bite, or cholera, by lightning or by any other accident, the usual banquet on the tenth day after the funeral is omitted. In its place the following ceremony is performed which is called *thor bel* or *bel garain*. It also takes place when a house has burned down. It may be held one or several years after the accident, but it must be on the full moon day (*punam*) of the month of *Chait* (March-April) or *Pus* (December-January). The day of the week does not matter.

During the time between the accident and the performance of the *bel garain*, special care is taken to prevent another similar accident in the family. If it was a tiger that had killed someone, the exorcism described above (*matti uthana*) is performed; if the death occurred by snake-bite, the snake exorcism is done; if a person died of cholera or plague, the *bida* ceremony is performed. But it appears that these rites which have only a temporary effect must be followed by a ceremony which protects the family of the deceased for all time against the attacks of the god or evil spirit which had caused the fatal accident. The villagers believe that the vengeance of the evil spirit is not appeased by one death only; unless they are protected by special magic rites, other members of the same family are also in great danger of a sudden death. The powerful spirit who could kill one person, is strong enough to kill his relatives also. Another explanation is that the spirit of the deceased himself who so suddenly was taken off cannot find peace in the other world and tries to return to his former home. He has turned into an evil spirit (*bhut*) and would harm his own relatives unless exorcised by a *dewar* (official village priest).

The same ceremony is also performed when a house has burned down. The priest is invited to perform the rite when

the house has been rebuilt and the damage repaired. It is believed that the heat of the fire drives away all the house gods. They must be recalled through the performance of the *bel garain* ceremony.

If the temporary exorcism by the *dewar* has been successful for a whole year, and no other member of the mourning family has been slain in the same manner by a vengeful deity, it is thought time to perform the *bel garain* ceremony for the surviving relatives and kinsmen.

For this feast, all the relatives and friends of the family, as well as those living in distant villages, are invited. To attend the feast, the latter have to be informed earlier than friends and relatives living in the neighbourhood. The officiating priest (*dewar* or *guru*), a Bhumia, arrives early in the morning of the day when the ceremony is to be performed. If his home village is very far away, he may arrive on the previous evening. He must fast on the day of the feast, i.e., he may not eat or drink till the ceremony is over. not eat or drink till the ceremony is over.

The *thor bel* ceremony is held at a suitable place along a river near the village. There the guests assemble, carrying all the provisions for a festive banquet which is to follow the exorcism. To feed the whole crowd of guests and villagers, it requires about seven *kuru* of *kodai*, five *paili* of pulse (*dar*), one seer of salt, half a seer of pepper (*mirchi*), turmeric and other spices; also a goat, a pig and perhaps a few chickens. The fee of the officiating priest must also be brought to the river and deposited before him, or he will refuse to perform the ceremony. He demands at least fifty rupees from a poor man, and much more from a wealthy person.

While all the people, outside guests and fellow villagers, proceed in a leisurely way to the river, the exorcist secretly sticks a piece of his magic root into a crack in the door of the house of mourning. He then hammers a nail into the threshold of the door, and another nail into the gate leading from the village lane into the courtyard, and pours liquor on the nails. If the ceremony is performed for a house that was burned down, he also sacrifices a chicken to each of the household gods, one to *Dulha deo*, one to *Narayan deo* and one to



*Rat mai*. He offers *hum* and sprinkles liquor on the offering. The rest of the bottle he drinks himself.

After these ceremonies have been performed he too proceeds to the river where all the people are already present and waiting for him. Now the exorcist requests the nearest kinsmen of the deceased or, in case the deceased was a woman, her husband's relatives, to step with him into the river and to form a small circle, facing outwards. When the circle is formed, he produces a long string woven of three equally long threads which must be new (*nawa* or *koro sut*) and have never been used before. They should be of cotton and unbleached. This string the *dewar* winds around the men standing in a circle in the water, each man holding the string between the fingers of his folded hands. The exorcist brings a rope made of the bark fibre of a creeper which is called *dokar bel* (hence the name *thor bel* or *bel garain*), or of the *kaboti* tree which usually grows near rivers or pools. The rope must be as long as the string and is also drawn around the group of men standing in the water. Sometimes the rope is wound together with the string and then drawn around the men. The ends of the rope are placed in the joined hands of the most prominent or the oldest man in the group. He must hold the ends in such a way that they slightly overlap.

Now the exorcist pours a few grains of *kodai* into the hands of the man holding the ends of the rope and string. He takes a cock and a hen of black colour, usually half-grown animals, and holds their heads close to the hands of the man. As soon as they pick up a few grains, he twists their heads off. Care is taken that the blood of the victims may not fall on the rope or on the hands of the man holding the rope, but into the water. Then the exorcist pours liquor on the rope and recites some incantations. After this offering he takes a sickle and cuts the rope and the string between the joined hands of each man; according to one informant, only between the folded hands of the man holding the overlapping ends of rope and string. Each man passes his end of the rope under his right thigh and gives it to the exorcist who collects all the pieces or, in case the rope is cut only once, just winds it

into a ball which he pushes under a large boulder in the river with the sacrificed chickens. He next hammers a nail into the boulder and sacrifices a pigling on it. With its blood he sprinkles the boulder.

When the ceremony is over, the kinsmen of the deceased return to the place where the other people are standing or squatting and watching the performance. The exorcist now asks for a new sheet, about seven cubits long, which he spreads over the ground and lies down on it. Now all the men present approach, throw some coins on the sheet, step over the prostrate body of the exorcist and walk away. When all the men have done so, a few old men return and sit down near the exorcist who slowly rises, puts the money collected on the sheet into his pocket, collects the *kodai* and the other provisions brought for him, also the goat, and returns to his home village without once looking back. If instead of the fifty rupees he is presented with a bullock or buffalo, he does not take the animal with him, but comes later to fetch it. At home he gives a banquet to his caste fellows; it is for this purpose that the deceased's relatives gave him the *kodai* and the other foodstuff.

The relatives of the deceased, their friends and fellow villagers meanwhile prepare a festive meal then and there at the river. They sometimes slaughter a pig or goat for dinner, but at least several fowls, which they eat with boiled rice or *kodai*. Of course, large quantities of liquor are also consumed. Sometimes the dinner is not taken at the river, but at the house of the celebrating family.

The persons for whose protection the *thor bel* ceremony was performed as well as their children and children's children, are henceforth forbidden to touch or to make use of the plant from which the rope (*dora*) was made for the *bel garain*. Not even plants of the same species, which grow wild in the jungle, should ever be touched by a member of the family. Because this prohibition would be awkward, the practical Gond and Bhumia choose a plant the bark of which is of no practical use for rope twisting. It is believed by the Gond and Bhumia that any offender of this taboo would die in the same manner as the person for whom or against



whom the *bel garain* ceremony was performed.

While this ceremony is performed for members of all castes and tribes in eastern Mandla,<sup>2</sup> not only for the Gond or Bhumia, the officiating priest or exorcist is almost always a Baiga (Bhumia), in rare cases a Gond. It is not known whether this rite is of Gond or of Bhumia origin.

<sup>2</sup> This rite is performed also by the Kavar, a primitive tribe in the hills of the Chhattisgarh Districts north of the Mahanadi. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, p. 398.





PART IV  
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS





## CHAPTER XIX

### THE UNIVERSE

It is not easy to discover anything definite about the concepts which Gond and Bhumia entertain concerning the universe and the world. Naturally the majority of the people do not give much thought to such speculations. Only exceptionally intelligent and inquisitive persons, or others whose vocation it is to ponder over such problems, like the *dewar*, the *gunia* and the *panda*, have a fairly clear idea about the universe, the origin of the world and of man. Obviously, concepts on these subjects are not at all uniform everywhere. The religion and cosmogony of the Gond and Bhumia are not expressions of a uniform creed or a logical exposition of scientific research. The beliefs and traditions of the Gond and Bhumia on this subject are largely influenced by local and individual interpretations, but they are generally based on the teachings of the Hindu religion. It is generally assumed that the Bhumia know more about religion than the Gond.

According to Musra, a Bhumia Panda and the son of a Dewar, the universe is divided into three regions<sup>1</sup>: One is called Indra lok, the second Singar dip, and the third region is called Utra khand. Indra lok is located somewhere in the sky, outside and above the earth. Indra lok is the abode of *Bhagwan*, the Supreme Being, and of his servants, the *dut* or

<sup>1</sup> The division of the universe into three world regions is already found in the Rgveda: above the earth is the air (*autariksa*), and above this the heaven (*dīu*). The Satapatha Brahmanas speak also of three worlds (S. Br. 2, 1, 4, 25). The Upanisads divide the universe likewise into three regions: earth, air and heaven (Chandogya 1, 3, 7; 2, 21, 1; 3; 5, 5. Brihadaranyaka 1, 2, 3; 1, 5, 4; 3, 9, 8; Prasna 5, 7). Later four higher regions were added with Brahmaloaka as the highest (Taittiriya-Aranyakam 10, 27-28) and, correspondingly, seven nether-worlds inhabited by demons and serpent-spirits (Aruneaya 1; Vedantasara 129). The earth is divided into seven continents or islands (Saptadvipa), surrounded by the ocean (Nrisinhapurvatapaniya 1, 2; 5, 2).

messengers. *Bhagwan*, the Supreme God, resides alone in Indra lok<sup>2</sup>, but for his personal attendants, the *dut*, there are no other residents in Indra lok. Only the five Pandava brothers with their mother Kotima may stay for a while in Indra lok, but they have no permanent residence there. The messengers of *Bhagwan* are invisible spirits whom he sends to the earth to 'take away' the life-spirits of men. Though they are angels of death, the Bhumia do not fear them nor regard them as evil spirits; on the contrary, they are regarded as good spirits because they fulfil the will of *Bhagwan*. The souls of the dead also go to Indra lok, but only for a short while. Then they must needs return to the earth and are reborn as babies.

No definite details are known about Indra lok: its position and dimensions, its appearance, fauna and flora. Nor is it known whether Indra lok resembles the earth or whether it is altogether different.

The second region in the Bhumia universe is called Singar dip, the earth, where not only man lives, but also the minor male and female deities, the *deo* and *mata*, and the evil spirits (*bhut*). It is significant that these superhuman powers, benevolent or malignant towards mankind, are located in Singar dip<sup>3</sup> and not with *Bhagwan* in Indra lok.

<sup>2</sup> *Indra lok* is a Sanskrit term and means: region of the sky. The Sanskrit form of this term allows certain conclusions as to the origin of these beliefs. It tallies well with the division of the world by the Upanisads. The Bhumia version appears as a locally adapted old Hindu tradition. There is nothing strange in this, since the Bhumia must have come under persistent and intensive Hindu influence, or they would not have so completely adopted the Indo-Aryan language. It is not likely that this Hindu element came to the Bhumia through the Gond, though in eastern Mandla the Gond speak the same Chhattisgarhi Hindi dialect as the Bhumia. But the *garh* names of the Gond show that they came from western Mandla where the remaining Gond still speak Gondi, a Dravidian dialect. The Gond who immigrated into eastern Mandla must have adopted the Chhattisgarhi dialect there, at a time when the Bhumia had been speaking it already for a long time. The character of the religious traditions of the Bhumia, as also the language of their folktales, though unmistakably Hindu, are of rather archaic type.

<sup>3</sup> *Dip*, in Sanskrit *dvīp*, means island (because the square earth is



About the general appearance and the geography of the earth, the Bhumia know little and care less. Though a good number of them have been to Assam for work in the tea-gardens and on their journey to Assam and back have seen a considerable part of India, the whole tour seems to have made very little impression on them. Gond and Bhumia apparently take little interest in things and events outside their own world.

The third region in the universe is called *Utra khand*<sup>4</sup>, the nether-world. This region is peopled with snakes. Their king is *Burha Nang* ('the Ancient Serpent'). His wife is called *Dudh Nang* ('the Milk Snake'), and King *Burha Nang* has a servant and concubine (*sati*), Malhin by name. *Utra khand* is an exact replica of Singar dip, but richer and more beautiful, a veritable paradise.<sup>5</sup> Though *Utra khand* is inaccessible to ordinary human beings, a *dewar* once was able to penetrate to this kingdom of the snakes. He gave the following information about it:

*Burha Nang* has the shape and appearance of a man, but his body ends with the tail of a snake. His face is also snake-like, with protruding nose and mouth. His teeth, however,

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surrounded by the four oceans. Cf. H. Lueders (1951): pp. 288 ff.). *Singar* means 'beautiful'. But it is more probable that *singar* derives from *singa*, i.e. Simhala or Lanka (Ceylon). Singardip or Singaldip as Lanka is often mentioned in the folklore of Central India (private communication by D. Bhagvat). Some Gond clans claim descent from Ravana, the demon-king of Lanka.

<sup>4</sup> The Bhumia here seem to have mixed up the ancient traditions of the whole universe with those about the division of the earth. For *utra khand*, a Sanskrit term, really means northern (*uttara*) continent (*khand*). Seen from Ceylon, however, it would be appropriate to call India thus. In ancient times, India was ruled by the Naga kings, hence the tradition that *Utra khand* is inhabited by the serpent people. The Bhumia, however, locate *Utra khand* somewhere below the earth, in the ground, and believe that it is inhabited by real snakes which speak and behave like men.

<sup>5</sup> Before the Gond dynasties were established in Gondwana, the country was ruled by the Manas or Nagvansi kings of Wairagarh. They were snake-worshippers. From them the Bhumia may have learned their strange snake lore. Cf. E. Chatterton (1916): p. 54.

are human teeth, not the fangs of a snake, for he is holy, not a sinner. While he is not much taller than an ordinary man, his tail is three cubits long. He has hands and feet like any other man, but discards the luxury of clothes.

*Burha Nang's* wife, *Dudh Nang*, has a fair skin, whereas *Burha Nang's* complexion is a pale brown. The servant and concubine of *Burha Nang*, *Malhin*, is an old woman, of the caste *Mallaniya* (masseurs) and has the appearance of a human being. It is her task to massage the arms and legs of *Burha Nang* and his wife. But she also works in the garden; whence she is called *Malhin* (wife of the gardener). She fetches water for the house and garden and waters the plants in *Burha Nang's* garden. Some say that she is married. Her husband's name is *Malliya*; he too works in the garden.

When *Burha Nang* and *Dudh Nang* quarrel among themselves, as may occasionally happen between married couples, the *Malhin* restores peace. But, says *Musra*, it is not often that they quarrel, and then only very mildly, yet never so much as to make them guilty of sin.

Once some such quarrel started in the following manner: One evening *Burha Nang* was lying on his bed. He called his wife to massage his legs. In reply, *Dudh Nang* said that she would not do it as it was the job of the *Malhin*. *Burha Nang* explained that it was already so late that he could not call the *Malhin* at that late hour. *Dudh Nang* however remained obdurate. *Burha Nang* upbraided his wife; she got so angry that she ran away from the palace. She hid herself in the village resthouse (*chatti*), a miserable and ramshackle hut at that, on the outskirts of the village. A broken old bedstead and a broken *gorsi* (potsherd, used as a container for glowing coals to warm one's bed) were the only furniture in the hut. It was used by the snakes when visiting the town.

When the *Malhin* heard of the quarrel and how *Dudh Nang* had run away to hide in the village resthouse, she took a big basket with maize (*lai*) and gram (*channa*) and a bamboo rattle. The basket was so large that it contained twelve bags of grain. The *Malhin* entered the hut and sat down near the sulking *Dudh Nang*. She began to eat maize and the sound of her crunching went karr-karr-karr. At the same time



she also turned the rattle to the accompaniment of tarr-tarr-tarr. After a while the Malhin asked *Dudh Nang*: 'Why are you so angry?' *Dudh Nang* replied that she had been quarrelling with *Burha Nang*: 'He scolded me and made me angry. Therefore I ran away and I want to go to Singar dip.' But the Malhin advised her: 'Don't go to Singar dip. It is a wicked country. It is much better here in Utra khand. Promise me that you will not run away.' And *Dudh Nang* promised that she would not.

After she had made her promise, the Malhin again began eating maize and whirling the rattle. She made such a queer noise with it that *Dudh Nang* began to laugh and forgot all about her quarrel. The Malhin brought *Dudh Nang* back to the palace and *Burha Nang* was so pleased that he gave her a thousand rupees as a reward. *Burha Nang* could easily pay that much, for he is very rich. He has even a mint of his own. The rupees are made by *Rupaini Nang*, a snake with spots on its back as large as a rupee.

*Burha Nang's* palace is made of silver, with silver walls, pillars and rafters. But the roof is covered with grass, which grows in Utra khand. Formerly there was no grass in Utra khand, until *Nanga Bhumini* brought it. She pulled a hair of her head and planted it in the ground. From that time, grass grows in Utra khand where it is needed only for thatching. The village resthouse, where *Dudh Nang* hid when she wanted to run away, is roofed with bamboo. Bamboo also grows in Utra khand; it grows from the finger of Janki mata (Sita), as related in another myth. The beams in the palace of *Burha Nang* are not tied together with ropes as in ordinary houses; the beams in the palace fit so exactly that there is no need at all of tying them. In Utra khand nobody needs to work when he wants a new house. He just expresses his desire to have a new house at a certain place, and there it is. The furniture of the palace is of the usual kind as in any other house: there is a fire, a hearth, earthen pots, etc.

Utra khand is a country where *kodo*, *kutki* and paddy grow in abundance. But wheat, gram and *masur* do not grow there. There are three kinds of soil in Utra khand: *chuhi matti*, which is white; *khuri* or *bara matti*, which is red; and *modo*

*matti*, which is black. The grain which grows in Utra khand is alive and walks and multiplies when people start eating it. It grows effortlessly. People just sit down and watch it grow.

*Burha Nang* eats a porcupine (*sehi*) every day, for the porcupine is *Burha Nang's* pig. The porcupine is cooked by *Dudh Nang* in water which the Malhin has to fetch from the well.

Along with porcupine meat, *Burha Nang* eats rice every day which *Dudh Nang* cooks for him in milk. She stirs the rice with her right hand, while she extracts milk from the fingers of her left hand. She also prepares a dish called *khoa*, a sweetmeat made of milk and sugar. *Burha Nang* eats first; *Dudh Nang* then eats what is left over. At one meal, *Burha Nang* takes only five mouthfuls of food, *Dudh Nang* three mouthfuls. These five mouthfuls are so large that they quite fill the stomach of the *Burha Nang*.

*Burha Nang* and *Dudh Nang* are immortal, as is *Hawa*, the wind. *Hawa* and *pran* (or *jiw*) are one and the same thing.

These details about Utra khand were brought to the knowledge of the Bhumia by a Dewar who had been in Utra khand. He got there in the following manner: One day he went into the jungle to hunt. He came to a high mountain deep in the jungle. There he saw a porcupine (*sehi*) sleeping in the sun at the entrance to its cave. The Dewar wanted to kill the porcupine as he thought: 'Today, I shall have meat for dinner!' But at that moment the porcupine woke up and slipped into the cave. These caves of the porcupines are sometimes so large that a man can stand upright in them. Now this cave was very large, and the hunter went after the animal. But the porcupine went deeper and deeper into the earth, yet the Dewar followed it closely. So they went on for seven days, the porcupine in flight of the man, the Dewar in pursuit of the animal.

At last the porcupine reached Utra khand and took refuge in the house of *Burha Nang*, the King of the Snakes, for the porcupine is *Burha Nang's* pig. When the hunting Dewar reached the porch (*angana*) of *Burha Nang's* palace, the king stood at the door of his house and asked the Dewar: 'From



where do you come? What do you want here?' The Dewar explained: 'I want to kill the porcupine.' But *Burha Nang* said: 'The porcupine belongs to me. It is my pig.'

But then *Burha Nang* invited the Dewar to sit down on a low stool (*pirha*). The Dewar, seeing that the low stool was really a Parayan snake rolled into a compact curl, refused to sit down. He was afraid that the snake would bite him. But *Burha Nang* told him not to be afraid. The Dewar, however, did not sit down. Then *Dudh Nang* prepared a meal for the Dewar: a porridge of *kodai*, *kutki* and rice, and porcupine meat, which she offered him on a brass plate. *Burha Nang* advised him to eat quickly because the food kept increasing on the plate with every mouthful the Dewar ate. The Dewar, however, felt shy and ate only a little so that the plate was soon full and the porridge overflowed and spread over the floor. It literally ran away. It was alive!

After the Dewar had eaten his fill, he felt sleepy. *Burha Nang* offered him a bed. But when the Dewar on closer inspection saw that his bed was really *Ajgar Nang* (python) rolled into a curl, he refused to lie down. *Burha Nang* told him not to be afraid, as the python would not hurt him. At last the Dewar lay down. But he could not fall asleep because he felt cold.

Next morning *Burha Nang* told him: 'Now get away from here.' The Dewar replied: 'Yes, I shall go presently. But give me some *kodo*, *kutki* and rice. Kill a porcupine and give its meat to me.' *Burha Nang* accordingly gave him *kodo*, *kutki* and rice and a saddle of porcupine meat. It took the Dewar seven days to return to Singar dip.

When he returned home after a fortnight, he found his kinsmen gathered at the funeral banquet (*kotmais*) for him. They had thought that he was dead. When the Dewar saw the men and women eating and drinking at his house, he asked: 'Why are so many people here?' But his guests asked him: 'Where have you been for such a long time? We thought that you had died, that is why we are now eating the funeral meal for you.' The Dewar replied: 'I have been in Utra khand.' His kinsmen asked him: 'Did you bring any food from there?' (They spoke of *Utra khand ka thola* 'the

provision which a traveller takes along on a journey'). The Dewar took his bundle (*ghatri*) from his shoulder and showed them the food which he had brought from Utra khand. His kinsmen said: 'How does grain look in Utra khand?' The Dewar said: 'This is *kodo* and this *kutki*, and this is rice from Utra khand.' The men said: 'But it looks just like ordinary grain.' The Dewar replied: 'No. It is grain from Utra khand. It is alive. It runs. It multiplies.' And he put the grain on a plate to show them how it increases on a plate. On this occasion the food on the plate did not stir at all. It did not increase or run away. It was no longer alive. The Dewar exclaimed: 'But it really ran away from my plate when I was eating it in Utra khand.' Then he related all his adventures and told them what he had seen in the nether-world. And his kinsmen asked him at last: 'Does it really look like that in Utra khand?' The Dewar said: 'Yes.'

At last his kinsmen said: 'But now that you have returned from Utra khand alive, we cannot eat your funeral banquet.' And they got ready to go away. But the Dewar said: 'Do not go away. Sit down and eat.' And he entertained them for three days.

A slightly different version of the same story is related at Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh (United Provinces). A Kharwar followed a Naga woman through a water hole to the palace of the Naga King who entertained him royally. When the man returned to his home his relatives were just performing the death-rites in his honour.<sup>6</sup> D. N. Majumdar was told the same story by a Majhwar youth;<sup>7</sup> in this case the hero of the story was a Majhwar.

<sup>6</sup> W. Crooke (1926): p. 387 f.

<sup>7</sup> D. N. Majumdar (1944): pp. 8-9.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE GODS

BOTH Gond and Bhumia are clearly polytheistic in their religious beliefs and practices. A few of the gods whom they worship, they share with the non-tribals at large; some gods they have in common with the other aboriginal tribes of eastern Mandla; but a few are peculiar to each individual tribe or tribal group.

Like the Hindus and all the other aboriginal tribes of the district, the Gond and Bhumia also recognize *Bhagwan* as the maker and master of the universe. Yet, in their religious practice, *Bhagwan* plays a rather unimportant part. Scarcely ever do they pray to him, and no sacrifices are performed in his honour. He is to them more a philosophical concept than a person.

Besides *Bhagwan*, the Gond as well as the Bhumia worship a high-god whom the former call *Bara deo*, the latter *Thakur deo*. *Thakur deo* is not exclusively a Bhumia or Baiga god; in Bengal, for instance, this name is widely used for the chief god of the Hindus. Nor is *Bara deo* exclusively a Gond deity. Many tribes and castes in eastern Madhya Pradesh and in the adjoining districts of Bihar and Orissa call him their supreme god. This high-god, may he be called *Thakur deo* or *Bara deo* is identified by some with *Bhagwan*; others again reject this identity. He receives sacrifices and on many occasions prayers are addressed to him. His worship is very much alive in eastern Mandla.

Conspicuous in eastern Mandla is the absence of clan-god worship.<sup>1</sup> We know that especially the Gond, practically all over Madhya Pradesh, worship clan-gods, or at least regulate their marriages according to the number of their clan-gods.

<sup>1</sup> But each clan of the Gond has instead a *Bara deo* of its own, and the spirits of the deceased are united with *Bara deo* of their own clans a certain time after their death.

It is different in eastern Mandla where, with the exception of one single Gond clan, neither the Gond nor the Bhumia worship any clan-gods.

Gond and Bhumia venerate a number of male and female deities, the *deo* and *devi* (or *mata*). They are supposed to help them in all the various phases of life. They are family and household gods (*Narayan deo*, *Dulha deo*, *Rat mai*, *Paniharin*, etc.), village gods (*Mero deo*, *Hardulal Baba*, *Kher deo* or *Kher mai*), field gods (*Aloha deo*, *Baghesur Pat*, *Kherwara deo*, *An mata*), cattle gods (*Holera deo*, *Mutua deo*, *Bhansasur*, etc.), forest gods and fertility gods (*Prithvi mata*), gods of disease (*Marai mata*, *Sitala mata*) and gods of the dead (*Marki deo*, *Dhano deo*).

In addition to these gods and goddesses, Gond and Bhumia believe in, and supplicate under various names, a great number of spirits, demons and goblins, personifications of the forces and phenomena of nature.

These deities and superhuman powers are believed to be inferior to *Bhagwan*; they are his servants, not his equals in rank. No creative power is attributed to them; this is a prerogative of *Bhagwan*. Human beings, too, may become deities: persons who have led an exceptionally saintly life. The spirits of the departed, in general, are called *bhut* and regarded as malignant spirits.

Gond and Bhumia believe that the minor gods and spirits live on this earth, not with *Bhagwan* in Indra lok. Though there are good spirits among them, i.e., those who are harmless or even benevolent towards men, they are not in any way intimate with *Bhagwan*; they live in an altogether different world and sphere. While the *deo* and *devi* are considered to be good spirits, the *bhut* and some of the *mata* are regarded as malignant powers and out to harm men. They are either personifications of nature forces or spirits of the departed. While the *bhut* are regarded as male spirits, the *mata* are female spirits. Of the latter some are benevolent, but the majority of them are as dangerous as the *bhut*. Musra says that the *bhut* and most of the *mata* are thieves who steal from human beings; who give them trouble and make them sick; who give them pain and even kill them. Still, though



the *bhut* are always enemies of man, they need not also be enemies of *Bhagwan*. The enemy of *Bhagwan* is called *sheitani*; he is not always an enemy of man; in fact, he sometimes helps him.

While accepting these general statements, we must always bear in mind that if we seek to discover, among the Bhumia and Gond, a well-ordered, clearly-defined and uniformly-practised religious system, we shall be looking in vain for it. Religious beliefs, practices and rituals vary almost from family to family, from village to village, and from tribe to tribe. A certain minimum is universally accepted by all the people; but beyond that there is the greatest variety in religious belief and religious practice.

### 1. BHAGWAN, THE SUPREME BEING

There is no possible doubt that the Gond and Bhumia of eastern Mandla have the concept of a personal Supreme Being, superior to all other gods and to the whole universe. This Supreme Being is called *Bhagwan*, or *Parmatma*, *Parmeshwar*. One informant, the Bhumia, Musra of Bijora, maintained that *Bhagwan* was greater than all the other gods, greater even than *Thakur deo* whom the Bhumia venerate as their main god. *Bhagwan* and *Parmatma* were only different names for the same god, said Musra. And he added with great emphasis, *Bhagwan* has always been and will always be.

Another informant, the Bhumia, Panga of Bijora, said: '*Bhagwan denewala hai, Bhagwan lenewala hai, Bhagwan rakhnewala hai*' ('*Bhagwan* is the Provider, *Bhagwan* is the Taker, *Bhagwan* is the Keeper').

Musra did not know whether *Bhagwan* had any father or mother. Nor did he know whether he had a wife, a son or daughter. But Panga said that he had heard from an old man that *Bhagwan* had a son whose name he did not know.

Sometimes Gond and Bhumia pray to *Bhagwan*, but they do not perform any sacrifices in his honour. They believe that he lives somewhere above the earth, in the sky (*Indra lok*). They maintain that nobody has ever seen him, that no

one has ever entered his abode. Panga thought that this was the reason why people knew so little about *Bhagwan*. If they could see him, they could ask him about himself. Bhagel, another Bhumia, when I asked what he knew about *Bhagwan*, admitted to me that he knew nothing about him except the fact that he existed. He did not know who had made the world.

Musra said that *Bhagwan* had servants whom he called *dut*, i.e. messengers. When asked whether this knowledge had been imbibed from Christian missionaries, he denied it and said: 'No. Our ancestors taught us that.' He also knew that the messengers carried out all the orders of *Bhagwan*. But he was ignorant of the number of their messengers and their names. These messengers, Musra said, must not be confused with the *deo* and *devi*, and the *bhut*. Sometimes *Bhagwan* himself is called a *deo*, i.e. a spirit; but then he is addressed as *Bara deo*, the great spirit.

The concept of *Bhagwan* which the Bhumia and Gond have does not in any way differ from the concept which the Hindu castes of Central India have of *Bhagwan*: He is the maker of the universe; he is infinite, perfect, holy and absolute spirit, eternal. They also share with Hindus the same curious attitude towards *Bhagwan*: they rarely pray to him, and never perform any acts of worship in his honour. All this suggests that the whole concept of *Bhagwan*, and not only his name, is borrowed from Hinduism, for we find that all over Central India, ordinary, uneducated Hindus speak in identical terms of *Bhagwan* and hold the same views about him.<sup>2</sup>

Besides this rather philosophical concept of the Supreme Being, we also meet with another form of *Bhagwan*; the *Bhagwan* of the myths. This *Bhagwan* is more anthropomorphic, at times even imperfect, and lacking in holiness, sincerity, power, knowledge. The term '*Bhagwan*' is here used in the sense in which Hindus address Krishna or Rama, or any of the other incarnations. These two concepts are thus at considerable variance; they should not be confused, though not even the Gond and Bhumia are able to keep them apart.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Fuchs (1950): pp. 228-30; S. Fuchs (1946-49): pp. 49-68.



This makes statements about *Bhagwan* at times rather contradictory.

### *Thakur deo of the Bhumia*

The Bhumia call their main god *Thakur deo*. This name is very common in Bengal and as far west as the Bilaspur District, probably the original home of the Bhumia. In this area, the Hindus commonly address their main god, that is to say the principal god of the particular sect to which they belong (whether Shiva, Vishnu or Rama) as *Thakur deo*.<sup>3</sup> The Bhumia often identify their *Thakur deo* with *Bhagwan*; but, in fact, *Thakur deo* appears as a less abstract, but more alive and active figure, than *Bhagwan*. Their *Thakur deo*<sup>4</sup> is the main god and protector of their villages. The Bhumia maintain that *Thakur deo* has no parents or a wife. But he is said to have several sons: their names are *Dulha deo*, *Ghamsen*, *Maswasi* and *Saiha deo*. These sons of *Thakur deo* are worshipped with him during the solemn sowing festival (*bidri*) at the beginning of the agricultural year.

*Thakur deo* is supposed to have his abode in each Bhumia village, usually in a tree. It can be any tree which the god selects as his home, a *semur*, *mahua*, or *sag* tree. At Bijora, for instance, *Thakur deo* lives in a *mahua* tree, at Dullopur in a *jarwa* tree (thorn bush). An old man of the village, or a soothsayer (*gunia*) in a trance, points out the tree in which *Thakur deo* has decided to stay after a new village is started. When by divination with the winnowing fan or with the stalks of *chirra* grass, by a dream, or in a trance, the exact location of *Thakur deo* has been fixed, the members of the new village community assemble one day at the tree and erect a shrine (*than*) for *Thakur deo*.

The place in front of the tree is cleared of all shrubs and grass, the ground levelled and covered with a layer of cattle

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. V. Thakkar (1950): Part 1, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Aryan origin of the word *Thakur* has been doubted, but no other possible derivation has been proposed. The word occurs in late Sanskrit in the form *thakkura*. The form *thakkura* shows that the word has been borrowed from Prakrit. It has almost the same signification as *sthavira*, and is used as a respectful title.' G. A. Grierson (1906): p. 31.

manure. A large stone slab is brought and laid on the ground at the base of the tree. On this slab another stone slab is placed in a vertical position and made to lean against the trunk of the sacred tree. Thereupon, the officiating village priest (*dewar*) burns the gum of the *sarai* tree as a *hum* offering. This gum is called *rar* (a Marathi word). On the stone slab lying on the ground the village priest places an earthen lamp with a burning wick in it. He anoints the stone slabs with turmeric (*hardi*) after which he sacrifices a goat and several fowls and offers liquor and coconuts. The liquor he spills on the stone slabs, and breaks the coconuts on the stone slab lying on the ground. He offers a few pieces of coconut to the god; the rest, as also a few bottles of liquor, are distributed among the villagers attending the ceremony. The meat of the sacrificial victims is boiled and eaten on the spot, but without the usual dish of rice. Whatever is left over, is buried in the ground.

It is believed that *Thakur deo* is actually present after this first sacrifice has been performed in the two stone slabs as also in the tree. This place is now called *kher* (village). On the same platform, other stone slabs are erected to represent various gods, as *Kher ki ma*, *Gham sen*, *Dharti mata*, *Baghesasur Pat*, *Kherwara deo* and others.

*Thakur deo* is supposed to keep the village immune from disease and misfortune and to help make the villagers prosperous by securing for them a fair annual harvest. The Bhumia, however, complain that nowadays *Thakur deo* seems rather slack in fulfilling his task as protector of the village. They say that in former days hunger and disease were little known among them. Panga of Bijora explained this state of things by pointing out that formerly the Bhumia had a better knowledge of *Thakur deo* and venerated him more earnestly. At present the Bhumia set more store on spirits (*bhut*), but this change of patrons has obviously not improved their condition.

The question of the identity of *Thakur deo* is not easy to solve. When asked whether *Thakur deo* could be identified with *Bhagwan*, my informants answered in the negative. They said that *Thakur deo* could not be *Bhagwan*, since on



various occasions he entered the body of a *gunia* and possessed him, a thing which *Bhagwan* never does. He would not lower himself to such practices. *Bhagwan* is a being apart. He has made everything. Moreover, the *Bhumia* perform sacrifices in honour of *Thakur deo*, which they never do in the case of *Bhagwan*.

But there is no doubt that *Thakur deo* of the *Bhumia* possesses many features attributive of a high-god. Is he the original high-god of the *Bhumia* who later had been displaced by *Bhagwan*? It may be so. On the other hand, this god's similarity to the *Dharma* of West Bengal is so striking that the probability cannot be overlooked inasmuch as the *Bhumia* adopted the concept and worship of *Thakur deo* from the *Dharma* worshippers of West Bengal. The name '*Thakur*' certainly points to a Bengal origin of the god; in fact, *Dharma* also has the epithet '*Thakur*'. Like *Thakur deo*, *Dharma Thakur* is also represented as a shapeless stone slab under a tree. The main worship of *Thakur deo*, the *bidri* ceremony, is performed towards the end of the hot season; *Dharma Thakur* is also worshipped in the hot season. *Thakur deo* of the *Bhumia* is a village god; so is *Dharma*. *Thakur deo* makes the crops prosper and protects the village against disease and misfortune; so does *Dharma*. An animal sacrifice is performed in honour of *Thakur deo* as of *Dharma*. *Thakur deo* has a special priest who alone can perform the sacrifice for the village; *Dharma*, too, has a special priest who worships the god in the name of the whole village.<sup>5</sup> If the assumption of Russell that the *Baiga* are an offshoot of the important *Bhuiya* tribe in Bihar and Bengal<sup>6</sup> holds water the probability that the *Baiga* have borrowed their *Thakur deo* from the *Dharma* cult becomes very great, for the *Bhuiya* call their high god *Dharam Deota* and worship him by rites which are very similar to those of the *Dharma* cult.<sup>7</sup>

When the *Bhumia* worship *Thakur deo*, the *Gond* look on. They scarcely ever take an active part in the worship of this god.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Asutosh Bhattacharyya (1953): p. 351-9.

<sup>6</sup> R. V. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 2, pp. 310 ff.

<sup>7</sup> S. C. Roy (1935): pp. 212 ff.; A. Bhattacharyya (1952): p. 136.

*The Sons of Thakur deo*

The sons of *Thakur deo* are: *Ghamsen*, *Maswasi* and *Saiha deo*. They are all worshipped with *Thakur deo* at the *bidri* sowing ceremony.

Of the sons of *Thakur deo*, *Ghamsen*<sup>8</sup> seems to be the most important. He has a separate shrine near the tree of *Thakur deo*; it is a pole around which a platform has been built. The Bhumia say that at the *bidri* sacrifice they worship *Thakur deo* in order to obtain a plentiful harvest; *Ghamsen*, to protect their village against disease and misfortune.

*Maswasi deo* is the god of hunting. The Bhumia pray to him before they go into the jungle to hunt. If the hunter is successful, he offers to *Maswasi* a chicken or coconut immediately before the meal prepared from the meat of the animal killed in the hunt. If the hunter has no luck, the offering is naturally omitted.

My informants denied that this god was represented in a stone or brass image, and they did not smear any blood of the victim killed in a hunt on their bows and arrows in honour of the god. Nor did they believe that the god was present in their bow and arrow.

Of *Saiha deo* my informants knew nothing definite. The god is never worshipped, except at the *bidri*.

*Bara deo of the Gond*

The veneration which *Thakur deo* receives from the Bhumia as their main god is extended among the Gond of eastern Mandla to *Bara deo*.

The Gond of eastern Mandla believe that this god always takes his abode in a *sajar* tree (*Terminalia tomentosa*) near the village. Like the Bhumia, the Gond also build a mud platform under the tree and place a flat stone on it and another stone slab in a vertical position, leaning against the tree.

Like the Bhumia, the Gond also believe that their main god has no parents, nor wife nor children. When asked whether *Bara deo* and *Bhagwan* (i.e. *Parmatma*, the high-god of the

<sup>8</sup> *Ghamsen* is probably derived from *Ghanasyama*, black like the rain-cloud, an epithet of Rama or Krishna. Cf. W. Crooke (1926): Vol. 1, p. 118.



non-tribals) were one and the same, my Gond informants answered in the affirmative.

The Gond pray to *Bara deo* for protection (*raksha de*), ask his pardon (*maphi de*), but rarely address other prayers to him. They also believe that *Bara deo* has made the earth.

*Bara deo*<sup>9</sup> is also the clan god of the Gond. Each clan has its own *Bara deo* at a certain place, wherever possible, near the original home village of the clan, the *garh*. There the ceremony of uniting the deceased members of the clan with *Bara deo* is performed. Once the spirit of the deceased is united with *Bara deo*, it stays with him. *Bara deo* provides it with food and drink. But after a certain time the spirit must return to the earth and is reincarnated in a child, a cow, a fowl or any other animal, just as *Parmatma* decrees.<sup>10</sup>

The favourite sacrificial animal of *Bara deo* is the pig. The god is said to prefer pigs to goats. However, where the eating of pork is forbidden by caste rules, *Bara deo* must be satisfied with the sacrifice of a goat or of a red chicken, a cock or fowl.<sup>11</sup> There is some indication that in former times the

<sup>9</sup> 'Bara deo' is a Hindi name and signifies 'the great god'. It is certain that, at least in eastern Mandla, the Gond understand the name *Bara deo* in this sense. However, among other Gond groups various other names are used which makes it doubtful if this etymology is right: Near Chanda, for instance, the god is known by the name of *Pharsa-pen*, elsewhere, as in Bastar, as *Bhera-pen*. In Orissa, the Gond, and allied tribes call him *Badiyal-pen*, in Sarguja he is known as *Bariya-sah*, while the Kharia, Oraon, Khond and Maler address him as *Biri*, *Bero*, *Ber* or *Bura*. *Bura* is sometimes pronounced as *burha* (ancient). It is probable that all these names are derived from a common root which signified 'light' or the 'sun'. Cf. D. Bhagwat (1953): p. 62; R. Rahmann (1936): p. 47-9; E. T. Dalton (1872): p. 281.

<sup>10</sup> It is significant that the Gond use the name '*Parmatma*' or '*Bhagwan*', non-tribal names, when they speak of rebirth, while at the uniting ceremony they address the god as *Bara deo*. It seems that the concept of rebirth has been borrowed from the Hindus.

<sup>11</sup> It is evident from Gond tradition that in old times *Bara deo* was honoured by the sacrifice of a cow. S. Hislop (1866): App. IV; W. Crooke (1896): Vol. III, p. 440; W. Crooke (1926): Vol. II, p. 103; E. T. Dalton (1872): p. 135. D. N. Bhagwat (1953: p. 73 f.) describes such a sacrifice which took place in the Oundhi tract of Drug (Madhya Pradesh). The ritual has some similarity with the *Laru kaj*, performed in honour of *Narayan deo*.

worship of *Bara deo* was an affair of the whole village community. But in eastern Mandla a poor replica of this feast has survived; it is described in the following manner by my informants:

When a man intends to perform the worship of *Bara deo*, he calls a few friends or relatives to his house. There the men choose from among themselves one who is of some repute to act as officiating priest. The priest having been chosen, all go out and look for a *Saj* tree (*Terminalia tomentosa*) where they can perform the sacrifice conveniently. They clean the place under the tree and erect a small platform. All go and take a bath in a nearby river or pond while the officiating priest remains a little behind and in the name of the ancestors wraps a turmeric stick (*hardi*) and a copper coin (*paisa*) in a piece of cloth which he hides somewhere near the tree. This small bundle is called *kund* (flower). Then he, too, goes and has his bath. After the bath all return to the tree, while the officiating priest goes and searches for the *kund*. When he finds it he sometimes throws it away. The other men when they notice him doing this promise him a small gift. The priest takes the *kund* and places it on the platform under the tree. When he has done so, he lights a wick in a small earthen bowl filled with sesame oil (*til*) which he places before the platform. His next task is to offer clarified butter (*ghee*) and incense (*loban*) to the god on the platform.

Now a goat is brought and fed with rice and *masur* grains. As soon as the goat—usually a male goat—begins to eat the grains, its head is cut off with an axe (*pharsa*) and as the blood gushes from its neck, it is spilled on *Bara deo's* platform. Instead of the goat, sometimes fowls or pigs are sacrificed in like manner and their blood spilled on the altar. A few coconuts are broken in offering. The meat of the victims is cooked and eaten with rice; the men alone partake of the meal, the women being excluded. The liver, however, is cooked separately and later offered with rice at *Bara deo's* shrine.



Thakur deo, Bara deo and Bhagwan

The multiplicity of high gods in the religion of the Gond and Bhumia—*Bhagwan*, *Bara deo* and *Thakur deo*—is no doubt confusing. But the enigma can be solved if we remember the peculiar mental disposition of the aborigines. The aboriginal does not concern himself with the world at large, but only with his limited and restricted circle of environment. He simply ignores the things outside the confines of his own narrow world. This peculiarity of the aboriginal mind is well illustrated in the creation myths of the various tribes. While the creation of the ancestor of the tribe is described in these myths in great detail, that of other men is usually ignored altogether. When asked how the people outside their tribe came into existence, they usually shrug their shoulders and say: 'We do not know. *Bhagwan* must have created them somehow.'

In accordance with this attitude, the aborigines conceive their high god not so much as the Creator and Lord of the whole universe, but as the maker and master of their own small world. Whether other people also pray to him, venerate him and offer him sacrifice does not concern them; they consider God only as far as he is concerned with their welfare. They are satisfied in the conviction that God listens to *their* prayers and accepts *their* offerings; whether he looks after the affairs of other people as well is a matter of indifference to them. They simply do not think of it.

Naturally, such a limited and self-centred conception of God easily leads to differentiation. The concept of God receives, so to say, a local colouring. Each tribe sees God in a slightly different light and from a different angle. Each tribe worships God in a different form. When later two tribes come into close contact with each other, they often adopt each other's tribal high god without recognizing his identity, especially if they address him by different names and worship him by different rites. Sometimes the identity is realized by some groups of the tribe, but rejected by other groups.

The same happens when the aborigines come into contact with superior cultures and religions. The *Dharma* cult, being the religion of a superior culture, though of low caste, was

probably adopted by the Baiga of their own accord, while their own high god was either submerged in *Dharma* or *Thakur deo*, or reduced to the stature of a minor god. Certain adjustments were of course made in beliefs and rites to suit their peculiar mentality. The same process was repeated when they learned to know about *Bhagwan*. Since the concept of *Bhagwan* is more perfect and universal, due to the superior religious concepts of the non-tribals, than that of their tribal chief god, they gladly adopted him as their Supreme Being. The adoption of *Bhagwan* as the Supreme Being was made so much the easier by the fact that no rites of worship are connected with him. He is more or less a philosophical concept. The Hindus worship him in his incarnations or, better still, in his personal forms of appearance: Vishnu, Shiva, Rama and Krishna are worshipped, and *Bhagwan* in them.

The aborigines now, when they had adopted the concept of *Bhagwan* from the non-tribals, were not obliged to accept any foreign form of worship along with the concept of a Supreme Being. They simply continued to worship their old gods in the traditional manner, either identifying their high-god with *Bhagwan* or relegating him to an inferior position in their pantheon.

Students of tribal religion, with only a superficial knowledge of the mentality of the aborigines, are too often misled by the expressions which the aborigines use in explaining their religious beliefs. Their vocabulary is often too inadequate to forge a precise definition of a religious term. A cultured and educated person may complete the expression of a concept with a more comprehensive and exact turn of phrase, while the same concept has for the primitive mind a much more restricted meaning. The right interpretation of primitive concepts requires more than a mere theoretical acquaintance with a primitive people. Scholars inclined to theorising often fail to realize this and are thus carried away by their own preconceptions.



## 2. THE MINOR GODS

## Narayan deo

*Narayan deo* is the household god of the Gond and Bhumia—*ghar ka deo*. His name would suggest that he is identical with the Hindu sun-god, whose name is *Narayan*. Though I was told by some Gond that their *Narayan* was the same as the sun-god of the Hindus, I doubt if this statement is correct. The Hindu sun-god is never a household god; moreover, he is always worshipped in the open; *Narayan deo*, however, is worshipped on the door-sill. In the ritual of the solemn pig sacrifice (*laru kaj*) a sun-god, called *Surya deo*, is worshipped by the Gond and Bhumia as a separate god: while the sacred *laru* is sacrificed to *Narayan deo*, another pig or chicken is offered to the sun-god. Still, there is a certain connection between *Narayan deo*, the household god, and the sun-god: Gond and Bhumia say that the doors of their houses should open to the east so that the inmates, when they step out in the morning, must bow low before the rising sun.

It must be borne in mind, however, that 'Narayan' is not only the name of the non-tribal sun-god; in Western India, especially in the Marathi and Kanarese-speaking tracts, it is also the name of the principal god, just as *Thakur deo* is the principal god in Bengal and Bihar, and *Bara deo* or *Maha deo* the principal god in Central India. This *Narayan*, or *Satya-narayan*, is commonly identified with Vishnu, while *Maha deo* is another name for Shiva-Shankar. In the Marathi-speaking districts, even the primitive tribes, like the Dhodia and Warli, worship a high-god whose name is *Naran deo*. This *Naran deo* was identified by one Warli magician with *Satya-narayan*. His position is that of a high-god; he is the god of gods. It is he who brings the rain. He has no father; his birth is shrouded in mystery. At night, he is seen in human form riding on a white bullock. His image is either a stone or an areca nut dubbed with red lead. The god is propitiated in case of sickness.<sup>12</sup> The conception of this *Naran deo* could have reached the Gond and Bhumia through the Kunbi, a

<sup>12</sup> Cf. K. J. Save: pp. 50-4.

caste of cultivators originally found in Western India. This god, as also Narayan deo of the Kanarese-speaking Hindus, shares the Gond household god's strong preference for pigs as sacrificial victims.

It is strange that though *Narayan deo* plays such an important part in the religious life of the Gond and Bhumia, so little is known about the god himself. There are no stone images, no brass or iron figures of the god. My informants did not know if *Narayan deo* had wife and children. His father is unknown. But Musra of Bijora knew the name of *Narayan deo's* mother. She is *Kotma* or *Kotwa*. *Narayan deo's* brothers are called the *Pandava* brothers (obviously the Pandava of the Mahabharata). Their names are *Bhimsen* (or *Bali deo*), *Arjun*, *Nakula*, *Sah deo* and *Dhuresul*. These five brothers have a common wife, *Darupti* by name. Her real husband is *Arjun*, though she is married also to the other brothers. Musra denied that *Arjun* shared his wife with his brothers.<sup>13</sup>

According to Musra, *Narayan deo* is the youngest son of *Kotma ma*, but his position is peculiar; he stands apart and is not treated as an equal. The legend relates that one day *Narayan deo* ate food prepared by a Domar (sweeper) whereupon his mother and his brothers expelled him from their home and refused to associate with him any longer. They advised him to live on the threshold of the houses of men and to serve them. If he served them well, they assured *Narayan deo* that all men would offer pigs to him in sacrifice.

From that time, *Narayan deo* is supposed to live on the door-sill of Gond and Bhumia houses. Musra sums up *Narayan deo's* task and duty in the following words: '*Kheti bari, ghar dwar, manushy, aur larka bachcha, aur gai bach-*

<sup>13</sup> In a myth of the aborigines in Dharampur State in Gujarat, Kunti, the wife of Pandu, conceived the Pandava brothers through the eating of five mangoes offered to her by *Mahadeo*.

In the myth, *Narandeo* dances before Kunti to persuade her to accept the five mangoes from *Mahadeo*. As a professional dancer, *Narandeo* would be inferior to the Pandava brothers. In the myth, however, there is no indication that he is a brother of the Pandava. Cf. D.P. Khanapurkar: The Aborigines of Gujarat. Unpublished MS. pp. 381-95. Cf. also: *Mahabharata* I, 120.



*chaya ka raita chaita Narayan deo ka kam hai* ('Narayan deo's task is to protect field and garden, house and door, man, boy and baby, cow and calf'). *Narayan deo* is supposed to protect the family against sickness and misfortune; he is also expected to provide a bountiful harvest from a few seed-grains. But Gond and Bhumia do not pray to this god for offspring. To fill a house with children is *Bhagwan's* job, says Musra. When a barren woman makes an offering in order to have a child she addresses her prayer to other gods, but never to *Narayan deo*.

#### Dulha deo

Another household god is *Dulha deo*. All legends about *Dulha deo* (lit. god bridegroom) centre round the fate of a Gond boy, who was killed by a tiger on his way to his wedding. He and his consort, *Dulhin deo*, are now household gods and are believed to live in each house in a corner of the main room, near the hearth. In eastern Mandla, they are not represented by any image.

Every third or fourth year, the Gond and Bhumia of eastern Mandla sacrifice in their houses a red or black cock and hen to this divine pair. The head of the family performs the sacrifice by cutting off the heads of the victims near the hearth fire on a spot well cleaned and coated with cow dung. Then a meal is prepared and all the members of the family partake of it.

Gond and Bhumia do not worship *Dulha deo* and his consort with the intention of obtaining some boon from them, but to avert dire punishment for an omission of the sacrifice. If they omit it, they might be killed by a tiger or snake; their cattle might be harmed in a similar manner; or their children might get sick and die.

#### Holera deo

*Holera deo* is the god of cattle.<sup>14</sup> His symbol is a small

<sup>14</sup> The Golar, a shepherd caste of the Telugu area, worship *Huleria*, a god who protects their cattle from disease and wild beasts. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, p. 37.

The Mang have a sub-caste, *Holer*, who are hide-curiers. Cf. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 1, p. 367.

figure of the *khumri*, the rain hood, about half a foot in size. It consists, like the real rain hood, of a slightly concave structure of bamboo slips which are plaited to a wickerwork. While the rain hood in natural size has a layer of *mohlain* leaves between the bamboo wickerwork to make it watertight, its ceremonial counterpart is without leaves.

This figure of the god is hung up in the cattleshed (*sar*). The string by which it is tied to the roof beam is twisted of the hair from a cow's tail. It is fixed to a stick of *padri* wood sticking in the roof beam of the cattleshed. Then a goat or fowl is killed in sacrifice.

When a cow or bullock gets lost in the jungle, the owner promises a coconut or some other offering to *Holera deo*. If the animal is found or returns by itself, the offering is faithfully performed. Such vows (*badua*) are also taken on occasions when the assistance of *Holera deo*, or of any other god or *mata*, is required in any other way. Such vows must be fulfilled soon after the prayer has been heard, or else the god takes revenge and makes the faithless petitioner sick or brings an accident or other misfortune upon him.

Gond and Bhumia alike worship this cattle god. The sacrifice is in each case performed by the head of the family in the cattleshed. The Gond do not, as in so many other sacrifices, call the village priest (*dewar*) to perform the ceremony; they do it themselves.

The Gond sometimes call *Holera deo*, *Satwara* (god of the cattleshed) or *Kherwara*. But the Bhumia believe that *Kherwara deo* is different from *Holera deo*.

Another cattle god is *Mutua deo*. This god is worshipped by the Ahir, and scarcely ever by the Gond and Bhumia.

#### Bhainsasur deo

*Bhainsasur deo* is the god of the water-buffaloes.<sup>15</sup> No image exists of the god, but he is believed to live in the stagnant pools which buffaloes frequent in the hot season. There they can be found buried in the muddy water up to the mouth and the ears.

<sup>15</sup> This god is worshipped all over Central and Northern India. Cf. S. Fuchs (1950): pp. 233, 275, 322; W. Crooke (1926): Vol. 1, p. 44.



When a Gond or Bhumia has a she-buffalo with calf, he often promises *Bhainsasur* the sacrifice of a pig. When the sacrifice is due, after the calf is born safely and gives promise to grow well, the owner buys a pigling, just past the stage of suckling, catches it by the hindlegs and smashes its head on the skull of the she-buffalo between the horns. Then the pigling is thrown outside. It is cut up; the meat is boiled and eaten by the family in the cattleshed.

If no sacrifice is made to *Bhainsasur deo*, the god would take possession of the buffalo cow, it is feared, and make her sterile, or he would make her throw the calf or at least prevent her giving milk.

### *Field Gods*

Gond and Bhumia worship various field gods. The very number of field gods suggests that various tribes have brought their field gods to Mandla District; but instead of concentrating upon one field god and merging the others in him, the tribes worship each god separately, but with more or less the same rites.

One of the field gods in *Baghesur Pat*, 'the tiger-god.' He is believed to live in a bush or tree. The Gond and Bhumia near Dindori have no image of the god. At Bijora, he is worshipped on the border-line between the two villages of Bijora and Dullopur. He is not worshipped at every village, for he is supposed to watch the fields of several villages.

At places where *Durga* is worshipped on Dasehra, the Gond make a figure of *Baghesur Pat*. A bamboo structure is set up and covered with paper which is painted to represent a tiger. With palms dipped in paint they daub fingerprints all over the body. Then they worship the god, sacrificing a black goat or pig before it, and offering coconuts. Then they take the figure (*murti*) to the river and submerge it in the water along with the figure of *Durga*.

The Bhumia worship the god at the *bidri* sowing ceremony after the worship of *Thakur deo*. They sacrifice a chicken in his honour. The god is supposed to dwell on the platform (*than*) of *Thakur deo*, with *Ghamsen* and the other attendants of the village god.

Another field god is *Kherwara deo*. This god is more popular among the Bhumia than among the Gond. He, too, is believed to be present on the platform (*chabutra*) of *Thakur deo*, and is worshipped on the *bidri* feast by the sacrifice of a spotted cock (*charka murga*) or a coconut. Sometimes the cock as well as the coconut are offered. It is said that this god is identical with *Khermai*, *Hardulal Baba*,<sup>16</sup> or *Hanuman*. At Bijora, however, there was a special post with a flag on the top for each of these gods, one for *Khermai*, one for *Hardulal*, and a third one for *Hanuman*.

At Junwani, *Khermai* or *Kher deo* was also called *gaon ka malak* ('Lord of the village'). He was represented in a stone slab. This god has a wife; she is called *Chhitlamai*. She, too, is a village goddess.

Then there is *Mero dai*, a goddess who watches over the village (*mer* is the village boundary line).

These field and village gods are worshipped usually every third year. Small strips of cloth (*dhaja* or *jhundi*) are tied to various posts on a common platform. These posts represent the different gods. They are painted with a daub of the sacred red paint, also with vermilion (*sendhur*). *Hum* is burned before the posts and sweets distributed. Often a more expensive sacrifice is made: *Khermai* gets a red he-goat, his wife, *Chhitlamai*, a black she-goat (which has not yet had kids), *Hardulal Baba* a white he-goat, *Mero dai* a black she-goat. A similar sacrifice is performed on this occasion in honour of *Panghat Panihari*, the goddess of the well or the pool, from which the villagers fetch their water.

### Aloha deo

*Aloha deo* is the guardian of the fields and protects them against ravaging wild pigs and deer (*khet ki raita chaita karta, sura sambhar se bachhata*). He is also called *Chahura deo*. *Aloha deo* is supposed to have a companion who is called *Khut deo*. But nothing definite is known about this god, nor is he worshipped by Gond or Bhumia.

<sup>16</sup> A Cholera godling, widely worshipped in northern India. Cf. W. Crooke (1926): Vol. 1, pp. 138-41.



After the threshing, in the month of *Magh* or *Phag* (February or March), when the grain has been cleaned and winnowed and is heaped up in a corner of the threshing floor (*kanihar*), the village priest (*dewar*) is called to perform a sacrifice in honour of the god. A cock is supplied by the owner of the field and the crop. The priest takes the cock and makes it pick up a few grains of *kodo*. Then he kills it with an axe (*pharsa*) in a corner of the barn, and offers *hum* to the god with the prayer: '*Hamare khet ko bachhais lai le, Aloha deo*' ('Take your share from what you have saved for us in the field').

After the sacrifice, all members of the family and the servants, if there are any, sit down in the hut of the threshing floor (*jhala*) and drink a bottle of liquor, a few drops of which they first sprinkle on the grain. This is called *darpauna*. After that a meal is served, a dish of rice and the meat of the sacrificed cock.

### Hanuman

In Central India, we scarcely find a single non-tribal village without a shrine of *Hanuman*, the monkey-god and faithful supporter of Rama in his fight with Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. The tribal villages of eastern Mandla, however, rarely display the familiar vermilion-painted stone image of *Hanuman*. Only in villages with a mixed population may such images be found. While *Hanuman* is the main village god and protector of the non-tribals, the Bhumia venerate *Thakur deo* as their patron and protector, and the Gond *Bara deo*. Still, at the platform where *Thakur deo* has his abode in a stone slab, there is also a stone which represents *Hanuman*.

According to my Bhumia informant, Musra, *Hanuman* plays an important part in the ceremony which the *dewar* performs when he delivers a village of a disease caused by an evil spirit (*bhut*), or of the danger from a man-eating tiger or other wild animals. The *dewar* who performs this ceremony (which is called *gaon banana*, 'to restore the village') gets possessed first by *Hanuman*, then by *Thakur deo*, and finally by *Thakur deo's* son, *Ghamsen*.

Some magicians (*panda*), whose patron *Hanuman* is believed

to be, locate him in the ladder which they erect near their house in a vertical position. Or they believe that *Hanuman* is present in a pole with a short cross beam near the top end, from which a chain is hanging with an iron ball (*gurudh*) at one end, and an iron arm ring (*churwa*), at the other.

While the Hindus of eastern Mandla call the monkey-god '*Mahavir*', the Bhumia and Gond call him '*Hanuman*'. It is said that this god is less popular among the Gond than among the Bhumia.

#### Prithwi mata

Both Gond and Bhumia have a great veneration for *Prithwi mata* or *Dharti mata*, 'the earth-mother'. The Gond, however, leave all actual worship of the goddess to the Bhumia. About her genealogy nothing was known to my informants. They only knew that *Dharti mata* at first had her abode in Utra khand, and was brought to Singar dip by Kichhul Raja, the tortoise.

The Bhumia consider *Prithwi mata* as the personification of the fertile soil, in opposition to the barren rock which, according to a Bhumia myth, was alone found on the earth before the arrival of *Prithwi mata*.

Many Bhumia maintain that the practice of shifting cultivation (*bewar*) had developed among them because they were forbidden to wound the breasts of the earth-mother with the ploughshare. But this mythological explanation of their peculiar manner of cultivation is not very convincing; and the old Bhumia who told me that the Bhumia did not plough in old times simply because they had no bullocks is probably nearer to the truth. The shifting cultivation is obviously an older form of agriculture and more adapted to the low material culture and the climatic and geographical conditions of the country where they formerly lived. As has happened so often before in the history of mankind, a custom or usage, introduced by economic necessity, received later a religious sanction and mythical explanation.

The same seems to be true also for the lack of brick-built and tile-roofed houses among the Bhumia, and to some extent also among the Gond. It is said that the Bhumia do not build



brick-houses because they are forbidden to burn *Dharti mata* in a kiln. For this reason they only use sun-dried bricks and cover their houses with thatch or straw. But the real explanation is that the Bhumia, and to some extent also the Gond, with their shifting cultivation had no use for permanent houses. When a field was exhausted, they had to look for a new jungle and to shift their homesteads as well. It would have been a waste of time and money to build elaborate houses, and to abandon them after a couple of years. Moreover, the Gond and Bhumia do not like to remain in a house after several members of their family have died in it. They leave such ill-fated houses and build themselves new ones. Had they brick-built houses, they would not abandon them so light-heartedly. And indeed, now that some Gond and even Bhumia have started to build brick-houses, they do not leave them, even if several persons have died in them. They have also started to burn bricks in kilns. To appease their bad conscience, they fine the man who lights the kiln a bottle of liquor (*daru*). But more often they call a Kumar, a professional brick-maker, to burn the bricks and tiles for their houses or at least to light the kiln after they themselves have built it.

The Bhumia make offerings to *Prithwi mata* on many occasions. When a Bhumia or Gond drinks liquor, he spills the first drops on the ground before he drinks. Many do it quite mechanically and scarcely know that it is an offering to *Prithwi mata*; some might even omit it; but more religious-minded aboriginals perform it as an offering to the earth-mother.

At the *bidri* sowing ceremony, a black chicken is sacrificed in honour of the earth-mother by suffocation. The victim's head is pressed into the loose soil till it dies.

When the *kutki* is harvested, an offering to *Prithwi mata* must be performed before the new grain is eaten. *Kutki* is husked and boiled with other grains, and before the meal is taken, milk and other food is spilled on the ground for *Prithwi mata*. This offering is performed in the month of *Magh* (January-February). At this offering the earth-mother is addressed as *Anadai* or *Kutkidai*. One of my informants,

however, insisted that *Anadai* or *Kutkidai* (lit. 'mother of grain', resp. *kutki*) is not the *mata* herself, but the fruit of *Prithwi mata* which, on this occasion, is dished up for the first time in the new year. Sometimes *Anadai* appears as a male god and is then called *An deo*.

The aborigines, however, believe that these occasional offerings are not sufficient for *Prithwi mata*. After years and years of cultivation, *Prithwi mata* feels exhausted and needs a rejuvenation. This can only be achieved by hecatombs of human beings. *Dharti mata* then says to the mysterious *Malhin*, the servant and companion of *Burha Nang*: '*Hamko manushy ki bharti de*' ('Give me an offering of human beings'). And the *Malhin* causes an earthquake, the result of which is a widespread and deadly contagious disease. Innumerable people then die. They are not, as usual, burned on the pyre, but buried in the ground, as a fertilizing sacrifice to *Dharti mata*. When the disease subsides, it can be taken as a sign that *Dharti mata* is now satisfied and that the next few years will yield a bumper crop.

Another informant related the following to me as a proof of this belief. Many years ago he went one day with his brother-in-law into the jungle to hunt deer. After a long walk both were tired and sat down by a hillside. All of a sudden the ground began to tremble and to quake; a huge boulder got loose just above their heads and rolled down between them. Soon after this event, in which they narrowly escaped death, a severe epidemic broke out and ravaged the villages of eastern Mandla (it probably was the influenza epidemic of 1918-19) and in consequence many people died. At Bijora alone, more than a hundred persons died within a short time.

In close connection with this man-slaying activity of *Prithwi mata* stand the seven *mata* who are sometimes identified with the earth-mother merely as different aspects of the same goddess, or considered as her sisters. The names of the seven *mata* are: *Kali*, *Virasen*, *Marai* (whom my informant, *Musra*, called a dreadful deity), *Nirashin*, *Sarda*, *Naishogni* and *Burhi mata*, 'the goddess of small-pox'. Their names sometimes vary, but their number is usually kept at seven. Each of these



*mata* is believed to cause a certain contagious disease: either cholera or small-pox, chicken-pox, pest, influenza, etc. In the non-tribal villages, these seven *mata* are represented in seven roughly-hewn stone slabs which, on a square low platform, are stuck in the ground in a row, the biggest stone in the centre, the smallest at either end of the row.

### *Other Female Deities*

#### Bhawani Mata

This goddess is commonly known by the name of *Durga* or *Kali*. She is obviously a Hindu goddess. In general, neither Gond nor Bhumia have a brass or clay figurine of this *mata*. But sometimes *Bhawani mata* is represented in a clod of clay in which a trident (*tarsul*) is stuck. The goddess is supposed to be present in the trident.

*Bhawani mata* is worshipped by Gond and Bhumia every third or fifth year on Diwari. A red he-goat is sacrificed on the veranda (*angana*) of the house. Poor people sacrifice a red fowl or just a coconut. The sacrificial victim is be-headed with an axe (*pharsa*).

#### Narbada Mai

'Mother Narbada' is the goddess of the Narbada River. Gond and Bhumia do not worship this goddess, but their *panda* (devotees of the goddess) do. Worship of rivers does not seem to be a part of Gond or Bhumia religion. The *panda* imitate Hindus in their worship of the river.

The offering simply consists in the breaking of a coconut. A fire is lit and incense and clarified butter burned, and a small piece of the coconut is thrown into the fire. The offering is performed at home or on the river bank.

#### Rat Mai

*Rat mai* ('Mother Night') is worshipped by Gond and Bhumia, Panka, Ahir, and the other tribes and castes of the district. The goddess about whom nothing definite is known is supposed to protect them from the dangers lurking in the dark. They pray to the *mata* to watch over their sleep so that

neither they themselves nor their cattle may be bitten by a snake or attacked by a tiger. They especially pray to the goddess when they return from the market late at night.

The place assigned to *Rat mai* in the house is near the grain bins (*khotia*); according to other informants she stays near the spot where the water vessels are kept. The Bhumia claim that *Rat mai* is a Bhumia goddess and that she is kind to those who venerate her. But they are as ignorant as the Gond and other tribes in regard to details about the goddess.

To this goddess, the aboriginals sacrifice a black hen—never a cock—and on rare occasions a female pigling (*ghitiya*). The sacrifice must be performed at night. The members of the household prepare themselves for it by a thorough cleaning of the house and of all the cooking utensils. Then they take a bath and wash their own clothes. After that a pit is dug in the house and the victim is beheaded over it with an axe (*pharsa*). The blood gushing from the cut throat of the animal is allowed to flow into the pit. Then a meal is prepared of the victim's meat; it is eaten the very same night by all the inmates of the house. Outsiders are excluded. Nothing should be left over; the bones and any other parts, which cannot be consumed, are buried in the pit.

*Rat mai* is sometimes identified with the goddess of the waterplace, and then called *Paniharin*. But others are of the opinion that *Paniharin* is different from *Rat mai*.

### An mata

A field goddess whom the Bhumia often identify with *Thakur deo* himself or regard as his wife is *An mata*.<sup>17</sup> This goddess is supposed to make the crops prosper. The harvested grain itself is often called *an*. To *An mata* or *An dai*, the Gond and Bhumia make an offering in the barn (*kanihar*) after the harvest of the *kodo* and *kutki*. Before the post (*merhi*) in the centre of the threshing floor (*daye*) around which the threshing bullocks are driven, they offer a fowl

<sup>17</sup> *An mata* is, of course, identical with *Ana-purna*, the corn goddess, or *Gauri*, of Rajputana. The Hindus venerate this goddess under the name of *Parvati*. Cf. J. Tod (1920): Vol. 2, pp. 665 ff.



or a pig. The blood of the victim is sprinkled over the grain. Then they burn incense and make a libation of milk and liquor.

### *The Gods of the Dead*

#### Marki deo

According to my Bhumia informants, *Marki deo* is the god of the deceased. He lives with the spirits of those who have died and are haunting the jungle. He is a very malignant god: when he enters a village, all the people in it get sick and die.

Musra of Bijora told me that once or twice in a year he meets the god who appears in the shape of a flame, similar to the light of a lamp (*diya*), only much brighter and white. Musra admitted that he is very scared when he sees the god and runs away as fast as he can when the god appears to him.

My Gond informants, on the other hand, though they had heard the name of the god, did not know anything about him. Nor did they seem much afraid of the god. They said that it was a Bhumia god; Gond do not worship *Marki deo*.

#### Dhano deo

This is another Bhumia god of the dead. He also appears in the form of a bright white flame. But since he always remains in the jungle and does not enter the villages, he is not as much feared as *Marki deo*. Though he is not a benevolent deity, *Dhano deo* does not seem to make anybody ill.<sup>18</sup>

My Gond informants knew nothing about this god.

This short account of the religion of the Bhumia and Gond shows that these tribes have filled their pantheon with gods and goblins from various religions. Sometimes a deity appears even twice under different names, and is venerated with different rites. The aborigines have a tendency to include any deity in their pantheon that is venerated by any tribe or caste with which they come into contact. Whatever may

<sup>18</sup> According to the Balahi in the Nimar district, *Dhano* (or *Dhanvi*) makes people sick with pneumonia. Cf. S. Fuchs (1950): p. 276.

have been the original religion of the Bhumia and Gond in the past, it has been substantially enriched and considerably modified by the tenets of Hinduism. This process is progressing with great strides, especially among the Gond whom the Bhumia follow so faithfully. Every Hindu entering tribal territory is a missionary: Brahmins who have settled here and there in the villages along the Narbada River; the Bania merchants and moneylenders on whom Gond and Bhumia depend for loans; officials of the Revenue, Forest, Excise and Police Departments; social workers and reformers; pilgrims and mendicants who wander to the source of the holy Narbada; landlords; and last but not least their own caste leaders who, with the zeal of new converts, preach and propagate Hindu beliefs and customs.



## CHAPTER XXI

### CREATION MYTHS

#### 1. THE CREATION OF MAN AND OF THE FERTILE SOIL

THE FOLLOWING version of the creation myth is current among the Bhumia of eastern Mandla. My Gond informants told me that they were ignorant as to how man was made. This story of the creation was given to me by Musra, a Dewar of Bijora near Dindori.

There are three regions in the world: Indra lok, Singar dip and Utra khand. In Indra lok, *Bhagwan* is raja (king); in Utra khand rules *Burha Nang*; and the raja of Singar dip is Nanga Bhumia.

Before *Bhagwan* set about to form Nanga Baiga, he fasted for twelve years. During all this time he never took a bath nor did he once drink water. In consequence he became very dirty. When the twelve years were over, in the beginning of the thirteenth year, *Bhagwan* rubbed his armpits and his chest and much dirt came off. In each hand he took a bit of the dirt and began to turn it between thumb and forefinger. In this manner, he formed the figures of two human beings. He took them to his house and put them away, saying: 'One day they may become useful.'

After some time had elapsed, *Bhagwan* saw them one day lying on the floor of his house. He cut his little finger, extracted some blood from the wound and soaked the figures in it. Then he cut the nail of his little finger which is full of life-spirit (*jiw*) and blew the life-spirit into the male figure which he had made of the dirt of his body. Then he urged him to get up, saying, 'Get up! Get up!' and he shook him with his hands.

Nanga Baiga slowly sat up and looked at *Bhagwan* askew. He asked: 'What do you want? Where is my wife?' *Bhagwan* replied: 'She is lying there.' And he added the following

questions: 'Will you worship me? Will you serve me? Will you always obey my commandments?' Nanga Baiga replied: 'Yes, *Bhagwan*, I shall go wherever you send me.'

Then Nanga Baiga approached the female figure lying on the ground and breathed into her face, for *Bhagwan* had told him how to bring her to life. And Nanga Baiga called her and said: 'Get up! Get up!' and nudged her in the side. Nanga Baigin woke up. In this manner, Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin became one soul and one body. And they both were also one with *Bhagwan*, because they had been formed from the dirt of his body.

Then Nanga Baiga asked *Bhagwan*: 'Where shall I go?' *Bhagwan* told him: 'Go to Singar dip.' But in Singar dip there was nothing but barren rock, and the ocean.<sup>1</sup> Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin also felt ashamed because they had no clothes to cover themselves. In shame they went into the water of the ocean and there sat down, keeping only their heads above the level of the sea. They kept themselves alive by catching fish which they ate raw because at that time there was no fire in the world.

At that time, the Pandava brothers were also living in Singar dip with their mother Kotma.<sup>2</sup> They were five brothers, for at that time *Narayan deo* was not yet born; he came to life much later. The Pandava brothers lived partly in Singar dip, partly in Indra lok. They used to go up to Indra lok to attend the court (*kachheri*) of *Bhagwan*.

One day, Kotma *ma* complained to *Bhagwan* and said: 'There is no fertile soil in Singar dip. There is no grain there, no plants grow there, and no animals live in Singar dip. There you find nothing but rocks.' *Bhagwan* replied: 'There is fertile soil in Utra khand. Go and fetch it.' And he reminded Kotma *ma* and said to her: 'Burha Nang once promised your son, Bhimsen, to give him fertile soil if he came himself to Utra khand to fetch it.'

<sup>1</sup> In the times of the *Mahabharata*, it was believed that the ocean (*samudra*) flowed around the square earth. Cf. H. Lueders (1951): pp. 92 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The Gond do not worship Kotma *ma* or the Pandava brothers; the Bhumia do.



Now that *Bhagwan* had ordered the Pandava brothers to go down to Utra khand and fetch the fertile soil, the Pandava brothers were asking themselves how to get there. For there was no passage leading from Singar dip into Utra khand. But one day they saw Kichhul, the tortoise, in a crack of the solid rock. Kichhul raja had made himself a large cave in the rock where he lived. For he was a very big and strong animal.<sup>3</sup>

The Pandava brothers called Kichhul raja and ordered him to descend into Utra khand and to fetch them *Dharti ma*, the fertile soil. Kichhul raja asked himself: 'How can I make for myself a passage down to Utra khand?' After some thinking he went into his cave and made a big crack in the rock that went down until it reached Utra khand. Through this crack, Kichhul raja was able to make his way down into the nether-world.

But Kichhul raja did not go alone. He took some companions along; Gangeri bai, Mundra raja, Dih mausi and a fourth companion.<sup>4</sup> Gangeri bai is the wasp that builds a house of mud in the months of *Bhado* and *Kuar* (between August and October) every year. When her house is ready, she kills a worm—any worm serves her purpose—and puts the worm into her house. Then she covers the door with mud, and after some time a wasp of her own kind comes out of the mud-house. She makes a child of her own out of the child of another animal.<sup>5</sup> Mundra raja, the second companion that Kichhul raja took along to Utra khand, is a worm which eats mud. (He does a lot of harm to the crops in the fields because he bites off the tender plants near the root.) The third companion of Kichhul raja was Dih mausi, the white-ant, which also builds her own house of mud.

Half-way down to Utra khand, Kichhul raja and his companions were held up by the big Surja River. But Gangeri

<sup>3</sup> The part of the tortoise in the creation of the earth is conspicuous in the Puranic creation legends. Cf. S. T. Moses (1927): p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> My informant had forgotten who the fourth companion was.

<sup>5</sup> It is most probably *Eumenes eonica*, Fabr., an insect of the wasp kind which constructs mud tubes in which to deposit its eggs together with caterpillars on which the grubs are to feed.

bai took them all on her wings and carried them across to the other side.

When Kichhul raja reached Utra khand, he saw much that made him wonder. He said to himself: 'They have all sorts of comfort here. There is grain. There is a palace. They are really short of nothing here in Utra khand.'

The ruler of Utra khand was *Burha Nang*, the 'Ancient Serpent'. He had devised a seven-fold trap to prevent any intruder, intent on stealing *Dharti mata*, from entering his kingdom. Besides that, *Burha Nang* had posted Kakramal Kunwar in charge of the traps to guard the entrance into Utra khand. Kakramal Kunwar was a giant crab whose one arm rested on the floor of Utra khand, while the other reached up to Indra lok.

When Kichhul raja saw the formidable guard of Utra khand, he exclaimed: 'By my father! How can I get in? I shall get caught if I try to force my way into Utra khand. However, what does it matter. There is a king at Indra lok, and a king in Singar dip; they will rescue me if I get caught.'

And Kichhul raja bravely approached the entrance into Utra khand. He found Kakramal Kunwar fast asleep. Thus Kichhul raja found it easy to pass the sleeping guard; he also successfully avoided the seven-fold trap. Soon after Kichhul raja had entered Utra khand, he met *Dharti mata*, the fertile soil. She asked him: 'Whence do you come?' Kichhul raja replied: 'I come from Singar dip.' *Dharti mata* inquired further: 'Why did you come here? Don't you know that *Burha Nang* will kill you if he finds you here?' But Kichhul raja said: 'The Pandava brothers commanded me to come to Utra khand and to fetch *Dharti mata* to Singar dip. Now I have come here to carry you away to Singar dip.' *Dharti mata* asked: 'Who is king in Singar dip?' Kichhul raja replied: 'Nanga Baiga is king in Singar dip.' *Dharti mata* asked: 'Will he serve me if I go there? Will he worship me?' Kichhul raja promised: 'Yes. Certainly will he serve and worship you.' Then *Dharti mata* said: 'In that case I am ready to go to Singar dip. Now open your mouth and I shall enter your belly and hide there.' Kichhul raja sat down and opened his mouth wide. *Dharti mata* entered his body by the mouth



and filled him up, from the bottom to the top. The companions of Kichhul raja also gorged themselves with fertile soil. They ate all kinds of soil: white clay (*chuhi matti*), red clay, and black soil.

When Kichhul raja and his companions were quite satiated with earth, they got up and hastened back to Singar dip. For, after all, they were thieves who had come to rob *Dharti mata*. On his way back to Singar dip, Kichhul raja successfully passed six of the traps, but in his hurry he got entangled in the seventh one which closed around his leg. When Kichhul raja pulled at the trap to get out of it, Kakramal Kunwar felt the jerk and woke up, for the trap was tied to one of his arms. When the giant crab saw Kichhul raja, he flew at his throat. Kichhul raja fell on his back, and his legs and arms went up into the air.

Kichhul raja was very frightened and shouted: 'Mamaji, *johar*' ('Maternal uncle, I greet you'). Kakramal Kunwar asked: 'Who is greeting me?' Kichhul raja replied: 'I and *Dharti mata*.' Kakramal Kunwar asked again: 'Where is *Dharti mata*?' Kichhul raja replied: 'She is in my belly.' Kakramal Kunwar asked now: 'Why do you call me uncle? I do not know you. I never saw you before.' Kichhul raja said: 'But I am your sister's son.' Kakramal Kunwar asked: 'How is this possible?' Kichhul raja explained: 'Kakrai, your sister, is my mother. I was born between her breasts. How else could I call you uncle?' (The Bhumia believe that the female crab has real breasts like a woman. They say that the crab bears her children between her breasts.) Kakramal Kunwar said to Kichhul raja: 'Tell me your name.' Kichhul raja replied: 'My name is Kichhul.' When Kakramal Kunwar heard that, he said: 'If you are really my nephew, I shall release you.' And he took his arms away from the throat of Kichhul raja.

But at that moment *Burha Nang* woke up and, hearing the noise which Kakramal Kunwar made, he shouted: 'Who is at the gate, guard?' Kakramal Kunwar replied: 'A thief.' *Burha Nang* shouted: 'Bring him here!' And he sent *Sus nang* (a snake) who went and brought Kichhul raja and his companions to *Burha Nang's* court for trial.

Burha Nang asked *Sus nang*: 'Why did they come here?' *Sus nang* replied: 'They came to steal *Dharti mata*.' But Kichhul raja denied everything and said: 'It is not true. Do you not see that *Dharti mata* is not with me?' But *Sus nang* replied: 'He has swallowed *Dharti*. His belly is full with mud.' And *Sus nang* forced Kichhul raja's mouth open and looked into his stomach. *Sus nang* said: 'His body is filled up with *Dharti*.' Burha Nang asked Kichhul raja: 'You are a real thief! At whose bidding did you come to Utra khand?' Kichhul raja replied: 'Bhimsen sent me to fetch *Dharti* for him.' Burha Nang said: 'I shall not let *Dharti* go to Singar dip, unless Bhimsen himself comes to fetch her. Such was our agreement.'

Then Burha Nang commanded: 'Bring Kichhul raja and his companions to *Teli nang*. He shall squeeze out *Dharti* from his belly.' And *Teli nang* put Kichhul raja in the oil-press (*kolhu*) and squeezed him so hard, from the head down to the hind-legs, that Kichhul raja became quite thin and shrivelled up completely. The earth was pressed out of his body through the mouth and bottom and wherever there was an opening in his body. The companions of Kichhul raja were also squeezed till they disgorged all the earth which they had swallowed.

Burha Nang then commanded: 'Now leave Utra khand at once. Return to Singar dip.' And he ordered three constables to accompany the prisoners up to Singar dip and guard them on their way, lest they return once more to steal *Dharti mata*. The names of the three constables were: Paharchiti nang, Ajgar nang (python), and Koili nang.

But Kichhul raja had very long teeth, about a cubit in length. They were not closely set together, but stood a little apart, and some bits of mud had got stuck between the teeth. Nobody had noticed it.

When Kichhul raja came back to Singar dip through the crack which he had made, Kotma ma asked him: 'Did you bring *Dharti*?' Kichhul raja replied: 'Mother, I did not bring anything. I had a lot of trouble in Utra khand. They put me into jail, they squeezed me in the oil-press. Don't you see how thin and haggard I have become? Formerly I was nicely



plump and short, now I am twelve cubits long. I escaped with great difficulty.'

At that moment, Mundra raja came out of his cave, with a knife in one hand and a long needle in the other. He said to Kichhul raja: 'Open your mouth. I want to see if some mud has not got stuck between your teeth.' Kichhul raja opened his mouth and Mundra raja poked in the corners of his teeth with a needle. Then he scraped the teeth with his knife. When Kichhul raja felt the knife at his teeth, he got frightened and shouted: 'Don't stick your knife into my mouth. You will cut my teeth.' But Mundra raja took his knife and with one stroke cut off all the teeth of Kichhul raja. Then he took the teeth one by one and cleaned and scraped them till by sheer hard work he had collected a few grains of earth as small as a grain of *masur* (small pulse).

From Indra lok, *Bhagwan* watched the operation. When Mundra raja produced the small grain of fertile soil, he asked: 'What reward do you want for your work?' Mundra raja replied: 'Allow me to eat the *kodo* and *kutki* which from now on will grow in the fields.' *Bhagwan* said: 'You may eat the stalks at the root, but not the grain in the halm.' From that time Mundra raja infests the fields and sometimes does considerable damage to the crops by nibbling at the halms of the growing crops near the root. If too much damage is done by this insect, the *Bhumia*, though they still refrain from killing it, call a soothsayer (*gunia*) who buries a silver ring in the field and prays: 'Mundra raja, do not eat my grain.' Then he offers *hum* to him, burning incense on a fire of dung cakes. The same ceremony is performed when white-ants destroy the growing crops. For the white-ant (which also accompanied Kichhul raja into Utra khand) is the daughter or, as others say, the aunt (*mausi*) of Mundra raja.

The Pandava brothers who, too, had been watching everything that was going on asked now: 'What can we do with such a small grain of mud? And, besides, the earth is dead.' For *Dharti mata* had died when she was brought to Singar dip between the teeth of Kichhul raja.

Now Gangeri bai, the wasp, promised to bring *Dharti mata*

back to life. She recited the following incantation (*mantra*):

<i>Chuhi matti dauri phul</i>	White clay, the crop has withered,
<i>Phulan ke lage pagar</i>	The crop, after having blossomed.
<i>Sua Sarseti tai ban ke raur</i>	Sua Sarseti (Gangeri bai), after having made your house,
<i>Ek phul kat girao</i>	the plants, cut and fallen down
<i>Sowat nind jagao</i>	dead, bring back to life.
<i>Hank pari rai Sua se.</i>	Wake up, queen Sua.

#### FREE TRANSLATION

In white clay the crop has withered by the evil eye, after the blossoms had already begun to open. *Sua Sarseti* (*Gangeri bai*), now that you have built your house, bring back to life the plants, which have been eaten up and have fallen to the ground, dead. Bring back to life the plants, queen Sua.

This *mantra* is also recited when a field does not produce any crop. The Bhumia believe that witches or people with the evil eye put a spell on the field so that nothing but grass grows on it. They say then that *Dharti* is dead. A crop withered by the spell of a witch or by the evil eye is called *an dauri*. To remove the spell, they call a Baiga *gunia*, for they believe that a man of another caste has no real power over the earth. The *gunia* burns *hum* and sacrifices two cocks and three hens. The victims are usually small chickens. The *gunia* also offers a bottle of liquor; he sprinkles a few drops on the field and drinks the rest himself while reciting the above cited *mantra*.

The same text is also recited by the Baiga village priest (Dewar) at the annual sowing ceremony (*bidri*).

As a reward for bringing *Dharti mata* back to life, the Bhumia never kill a Gangeri wasp, but sometimes offer liquor to it. They call it also *guraini* (woman teacher or sorcerer) and believe that the wasp is immortal because it is reborn



every year from the worm buried in the mud-house that the wasp builds.<sup>6</sup>

When the earth had thus been restored to life by Gangeri bai, *Bhagwan* said to the Pandava brothers: 'Mix the earth with water and churn it.'

The Pandava brothers made a huge stone vessel, as large as a whole village, and filled it with water to the brim. Then they put the grain of earth into the vessel. But when they wanted to start churning, they found that they had no churn dasher nor a rope to turn the churning staff. For there was not a single tree in Singar dip from which such a churning staff could have been made. Nor was there any flax of which a rope could be twisted. The Pandava brothers did not know what to do. At last, Bhimsen saw the three snakes which had brought Kichhul raja and his companions back to Singar dip. He grabbed the snakes and said: 'I will not let you go to Utra khand until I have got plenty of earth. Or else I will kill you.' And Bhimsen took Ajar nang, the python, and made a churning-staff of it. At that time the python was much bigger and fatter than it is now. The Paharchiti nang, Bhimsen wound around the python as a churning rope.

Then Bhimsen said: 'Who is going to churn *Dharti*? The rope made of the snake might break if I do it.' Kotma ma replied: 'I will do it.' And she began to churn (*bhaina*) the earth in the stone vessel. Kotma ma churned and churned, while the Pandava brothers, her sons, looked into the churn and saw the earth rising and expanding under their very eyes. For there was magic in their looks. Then they dipped their hands into the vessel and the earth expanded yet more.

All the time *Bhagwan* kept on looking from Indra lok. At last he said: 'Pour a bottle of liquor into the churn and the earth will rise still higher and will fill the whole of Singar dip.' The Pandava brothers replied: 'No, we won't do it just now. We shall pour liquor on the earth after the whole of Singar dip has been covered with *Dharti*.' Kotma ma also advised them to wait with the liquor. But Bhimsen, who was very

<sup>6</sup> The Bhumia obviously failed to observe that the wasp lays its eggs into the worm which only provides nourishment for the young wasp during the time of its growth.

unruly and disrespectful, said to his mother: 'We got *Dharti* with so much difficulty. Unless we pour liquor on her now, she will run away and return to Utra khand. From where will we then get rice, *kodo* and *kutki*?' Kotma *ma* replied: 'But we have no liquor. From where shall we get it?'

*Bhagwan* said: 'Between Indra lok and Singar dip there is Adha khand (lit. intermediate region), where a *Sajan* tree (*Tectona grandis*) grows. In the hollow trunk of this tree you will find liquor.' The Pandava brothers looked up and saw that in Adha khand a *Sajan* and a *Mahua* tree (*Bassia latifolia*) had grown up together. The *Mahua* tree had flowered and the flowers had fallen into a hole in the trunk of the *Sajan* tree. Then rain had fallen on the flowers and the sun had shone on them. The flowers had fermented and turned into liquor.

Kotma *ma* said to Bhimsen: 'Go and fetch the liquor. But don't drink any of it.' And Bhimsen went up to Adha khand with giant strides. One step of his alone was so long that it covered the distance of twelve *kos* (24 miles). When Bhimsen reached Adha khand, he kept one foot on Singar dip, while he rested the other on Adha khand. He found the liquor in the hollow trunk of the *Sajan* tree, guarded by Hema Kalar (distiller of liquor) and Hema Kalarin, two Galri birds (*Mina*), who were distilling the liquor in twelve big barrels standing in the hollow of the *Sajan* tree.

Bhimsen exclaimed: 'Oh! There is much liquor here.' And, he asked Hema Kalarin: 'Give me some to drink. I want to know how it tastes.' Hema Kalarin took one of the stone barrels and gave it to Bhimsen, saying: 'You can drink as much as you like.' Bhimsen emptied the stone barrel with one gulp, nine gallons at a draught. There were many such stone barrels all placed in a row, just as in a grog shop. Bhimsen exclaimed: 'But this is very good stuff. Let me have more of it.' And he emptied all the stone barrels without paying anything for the liquor. As a result, he got very drunk. At last he said to Hema Kalar: 'Now give me a bottle of liquor for *Dharti*.' And Hema Kalar gave him a bottle full of the liquor. Bhimsen tied a string around the neck of the bottle and hung it over his shoulder. Then he returned to Singar dip.



*Bhagwan* said to *Bhimsen*: 'Now pour the liquor into the churn.' And *Bhimsen* took the bottle into his left hand and poured it into the hollow palm of his right hand. Then he sprinkled the liquor into the churn. At once, *Dharti ma* expanded and rose five cubits in the churn and expanded still more and rose to the brim of the stone pot and flowed over.

*Bhagwan* said to *Kotma ma*: 'Now take the stone vessel and carry it to the centre of *Singar dip*.' *Kotma ma* lifted the pot with the fertile soil on her head and carried it to the centre of *Singar dip*. *Bhimsen* poured more liquor on *Dharti* and the earth-mother spread and expanded and overflowed the pot and filled the whole earth down to the littlest hollows.

When *Dharti mata* thus spread over *Singar dip* with such tremendous speed, *Bhimsen* grew afraid that she might run away and return to *Utra kand*. He threw himself down on the ground to check her advance, folded his hands and besought her: 'Come back! Come back! Where are you going?' *Dharti mata*, however, did not listen and rushed over his body which was lying on the ground. She said: 'Pandava, why should I obey your orders? There is nobody here to worship me.' *Bhimsen* asked: 'Who should serve and worship you? I shall fetch him at once.' *Dharti mata* replied: 'Nanga Baiga should serve and worship me.' *Bhimsen* asked: 'Where is Nanga Baiga?' *Dharti mata* replied: 'How should I know? I never saw him myself. But you will find him sitting in the ocean.'

*Bhimsen* called *Hawa Pawan*, the wind, and asked him: 'Where is Nanga Baiga?' *Hawa Pawan* replied: 'Oh, I see him every day. I can bring him here in no time. Nanga Baiga is in the ocean. He is fishing there. He eats fish since there is no grain in *Singar dip*.' *Bhimsen* said: 'Bring him quickly!'

*Hawa Pawan* went off, as swiftly as a plane, to see where Nanga Baiga and his wife were hiding. And he found them standing up to their necks in the water. *Hawa Pawan* said to Nanga Baiga: '*Bhimsen* calls you to attend the *panchayat* (caste meeting) of the Pandava brothers.' But Nanga Baiga was reluctant to go and asked: 'How can I go there? There is *Bhagwan*. There are the Pandava brothers. There is *Dharti*

*mata*. But I am naked. I will not go because I feel ashamed to appear before the meeting without clothes.'

Hawa Pawan rushed back to Bhimsen and told him: 'Nanga Baiga is not coming. He feels ashamed to appear before the *panchayat* as he has no clothes to wear.' Bhimsen went to *Bhagwan* and told him the reason why Nanga Baiga refused to come. *Bhagwan* blew into his hands and his breath turned into a sheet of cloth which he gave Bhimsen. And Bhimsen handed it over to Hawa Pawan who went off with it to Nanga Baiga.

Nanga Baiga took the sheet which *Bhagwan* had made. It was sixteen cubits long. But Nanga Baiga's body was so large that the sheet was scarcely sufficient to cover his private parts. When Nanga Baiga began to dress, he found that he also needed a waistband. But there was no string to be found in the whole of Singar dip. He, therefore, took Koili nang, the third constable (*sipahi*) of *Burha Nang*, who had helped to expel Kichhul raja from Utra khand. He tied the snake round his waist; then he took the sheet, passed it between his legs and tucked it in under the waist-band. And so large was Nanga Baiga's body that the sheet, though long, was scarcely sufficient for him, and only a small strip of cloth was left which Nanga Baiga allowed to hang down as a flap in front. When Hawa Pawan saw this, he exclaimed: 'What a huge body!'

Now Nanga Baiga was ready to attend the *panchayat* of the Pandava brothers. But he took his own time and went very leisurely on his way. Hawa Pawan blew from behind and shouted: 'Hurry up a bit!' But Nanga Baiga could not be hurried. At last, Hawa Pawan made a box and advised Nanga Baiga to sit down on it. Nanga Baiga took his seat and the wind-god blew him up into the air and carried him off to the spot where the Pandava brothers were waiting.

*Dharti mata* saw Nanga Baiga when he was still twelve kos (24 miles) away. She began to arrange her hair. Nanga Baiga saw *Dharti mata* when he reached a distance of three kos and asked Hawa Pawan to stop and to allow him to alight. He said: 'I want to walk the rest of the way.'

When *Dharti mata* saw Nanga Baiga from far, she asked:



'From where has Nanga Baiga got his loincloth (*languti*)? He was naked before.' Nanga Baiga heard what she said and replied: 'By your order and the wish of *Bhagwan* I got this loincloth.' Then *Dharti mata* replied: 'But I am still naked. I want to be your wife.' When Nanga Baiga heard that, he took off his loincloth and threw it towards *Dharti mata*. And *Dharti mata* gave him a lotus leaf instead for a cover. Nanga Baiga tore off half of it and gave it to his wife Nanga Baigin. The leaf was sufficient to clothe both Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin.

Then Nanga Baiga approached and said: '*Johar, Dharti!*' ('Earth-mother, I pay my respects to you!'). *Dharti mata* replied: '*Johar, raja*. Will you worship me?' Nanga Baiga replied: 'Yes. I will certainly worship you.' *Dharti mata* then commanded: 'Sacrifice a black cock and a black fowl, and offer also a bottle of liquor to me.' Nanga Baiga now asked: 'Will you stay here at Singar dip if I perform these offerings to you?' *Dharti mata* replied: 'Yes. I shall remain here. But where is your wife?' Nanga Baiga said: 'She is still in the ocean.' *Dharti mata* said: 'From now on I too want to be your wife.' And she continued: 'If you want me to stay with you, cut off the little finger of your right hand, divide it into four parts and nail the pieces down at the four corners<sup>7</sup> of Singar dip. Then I shall always remain with you.'<sup>8</sup>

Nanga Baiga, who at that time had six fingers on each hand, cut off his little finger which was very long—about a cubit in length. He divided the finger into four parts and nailed the

<sup>7</sup> The conception of the square form of the earth is found in the *Mahabharata* (1, 68, 3; 1, 74, 108 etc.), *Ramayana* (5, 31, 4; 2, 104, 12) and in the *Jatakas* (267, 2; 488, 4), but already in the *Rgveda* (10, 58, 3). In later times, the earth was conceived as a round disc. Cf. H. Lueders (1951): pp. 79 ff.

<sup>8</sup> The aboriginal Warli of Western India have a similar story about the origin of the earth. But they believe that it was a potter who on a golden wheel turned the earth and enlarged it from the size of a tiny sesame grain to its present size. Balaya Bhim (obviously Bhima of the *Mahabharata* and Bhimsen of the *Bhumia*) lifted the earth and fixed it in its present position.... Four pillars were posted and cross-beams were placed on them. They were properly nailed.... Cf. K. J. Save (1945): pp. 161 f.

parts down at the four corners of the earth. Then he poured a bottle of liquor on each nail.

That is the story of the creation of *Nanga Baiga* and of *Dharti mata*.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. THE ORIGIN OF FIRE

There was Guru Mahadeo with his wife Parvati.

One day, *Bhagwan* said to Guru Mahadeo: 'Go and have a look around the world. See whether people have food to eat or not.' For *Bhagwan* was anxious to know how people were getting on in the world.

Guru Mahadeo took his golden staff and called Parvati who put a veil over her head. Then both were ready and left their house for the journey around the world.

On their journey, they passed through a field where a son of Nanga Bhumia had sown sesamum (*til*). To scare away the birds from his field, he had planted a scarecrow in the middle of his field. The scarecrow had the appearance of a man, waving his arms in the breeze, turning this way and that. When Parvati saw the scarecrow dangling in the wind, she said to Guru Mahadeo: 'This thing is useless. It can neither chase away the animals nor even threaten them. It is lifeless.'

And Parvati said to Guru Mahadeo: 'Give life to this scarecrow.' But Guru Mahadeo replied: 'I have nothing to do with this fellow. We had better get ahead and inspect the world, as we have been told to do by *Bhagwan*.' But Parvati insisted and said: 'What shall we tell *Bhagwan* on our return? So far you have accomplished nothing.' When Guru Mahadeo heard that, he took his bottle of life-giving water (*amrit pani*) and poured it over the scarecrow which quickened to life. Guru Mahadeo and Parvati left the living scarecrow in the field and proceeded on their journey.

But the scarecrow, which had turned into a man, called after Guru Mahadeo: 'You have given me life. What is my name?' And he ran after Mahadeo and shouted: 'Wait! Wait!'

<sup>9</sup> For more proofs of the Hinduistic origin of this creation myth cf. S. Fuchs (1952): Vol. 47, pp. 607-19.



Mahadeo stopped and asked: 'What do you want? Why are you running after me? Go back and watch your field.' But the scarecrow, which had turned into a man, asked: 'What is my name?' Mahadeo replied: 'Your name is Bhainsasur.' Then he continued his journey, and Bhainsasur returned to his field. He lay down to sleep and began thinking: 'My name is very long. How much power have I got? I had better run and ask Guru Mahadeo.' And he got up and ran again after Guru Mahadeo: 'Wait! Wait!' Guru Mahadeo got angry, turned back and asked: 'Why are you always running after me? You are holding me up all the time.' But Bhainsasur asked: 'I have got such a long name. I must certainly have much power. How much power have I got? Why did you give me life?' Guru Mahadeo replied: 'Place your hand on the head of any living being and it will burn to death.' When Bhainsasur heard that, he was satisfied and returned to his field.

But on the way he began to think. And he stopped. He thought: 'How beautiful is Mahadeo's wife. If I put my hand on Mahadeo's head, he will die and then I can marry Parvati.' So once more he ran back to Guru Mahadeo and asked him to stop. Mahadeo looked back and asked: 'What is the matter? What a troublesome fellow you are!' Then he stopped and asked again: 'Now, what do you want?'

Without much ado, Bhainsasur went up to Mahadeo with the intention of placing his hand on the god's head. Guru Mahadeo shouted: 'Do not put your hand on my head!' But Bhainsasur paid no attention to his warning and approached Guru Mahadeo. Thereupon, the god turned round and ran away as fast as he could. Bhainsasur chased after him, and they ran around the whole world, Mahadeo ahead and Bhainsasur pursuing him. At last, Mahadeo saw that he could not escape any longer and ran up to *Bhagwan*. *Bhagwan* asked him: 'Why are you running so fast?' Mahadeo replied: 'I am in great trouble.' *Bhagwan* asked: 'How did you get into trouble? What has happened?' Mahadeo explained: 'I made a man out of a scarecrow and gave him the name Bhainsasur. He got the power to burn any living being on whose head he placed his hand. Now the fellow is trying to place

his hand on my head, as he burns in love for my wife Parvati.'

*Bhagwan* replied: 'I can easily help you. Parvati and you should hide yourselves.' Mahadeo and Parvati did as bidden. *Bhagwan* now took the form of Parvati and went out to meet Bhainsasur. This false Parvati asked Bhainsasur: 'Where are you running to?' Bhainsasur replied: 'I am running after Mahadeo.' *Bhagwan* in the form of Parvati said: 'But Mahadeo has already died in that rivulet (*nala*) there!' Bhainsasur asked: 'Is that true? Then you are now a widow?' *Bhagwan* in the form of Parvati replied: 'Yes. I am all alone.' Bhainsasur said: 'If you are a widow, I can marry you.' And he took her to his house.

In the evening *Bhagwan*, in the disguise of Parvati, gave Bhainsasur some food: 'Come and eat your rice-broth (*pej*).' After the meal, *Bhagwan* went to sleep. Bhainsasur came and sat down on the bed. But *Bhagwan* in the form of Parvati said: 'You cannot sleep like that with me. When Mahadeo wanted to lie with me, he always first beat his head and his buttocks with both hands. You must do the same if you want to lie with me. Now, go and leave the house.' Bhainsasur went out of the room and asked: 'What must I do?' The bogus Parvati replied: 'My *guru* (religious teacher) placed one hand on his head and the other on his buttocks.' The stupid Bhainsasur did as suggested and in an instant was burned to ashes.

Then *Bhagwan* returned to his own form and called Mahadeo: 'Come out, Mahadeo.' But Mahadeo shouted: 'No, no, *Bhagwan*! I won't come! He will kill me!' But *Bhagwan* replied: 'Come, Mahadeo, Bhainsasur is dead.' *Guru Mahadeo* left his hiding place and asked *Bhagwan*: 'How did the fellow die? Did you kill him?' *Bhagwan* replied: 'He killed himself.' But Mahadeo was curious and asked: 'How did you accomplish it? I can hardly believe it. Show me how you did it.' *Bhagwan* replied: 'I will show you; but first cover your face with your hands.'

Mahadeo covered his face with his hands. *Bhagwan* again took the form of Parvati, but he appeared twice as beautiful as the real Parvati. Then *Bhagwan* said: 'Now look up, Mahadeo.' And Mahadeo looked. When he saw the lovely



form of Parvati, he was filled with love and his semen began to drop from him.<sup>10</sup> *Bhagwan* held the semen in his hands and said: 'The whole earth will burn up if it falls to the ground.'

But a few drops of the semen did fall on the ground. A few drops fell into a hollow bamboo. *Bhagwan* took the bamboo to his house. The rest of Mahadeo's semen he poured out on a huge rock which in a flash burned to ashes. A few other drops that fell on the ground turned into rust which makes the *kodo* sick. The rust which is called *agya* (fire) has a white flower and makes the plants wither when rain falls. The drops that fell on the rock are still there. If one beats a piece of steel against a flint, a spark comes out which might light a fire.

The bamboo tube, which contained some drops of Mahadeo's semen, *Bhagwan* gave to Bhimsen. Bhimsen said to himself: 'Where shall I keep it?' Then he went to a mountain in the jungle. On the mountain was a mango tree. Near the mango tree was a palace. In the palace lived a woman, Kariandni by name. But the door of the palace was locked, and Bhimsen could not get in, nor could Kariandni leave the palace. But there was a hole in the door and Kariandni put her ear to the hole and said to Bhimsen: 'Blow it into my ear.' Bhimsen took the bamboo tube, put it into the hole and blew Mahadeo's semen into her ear. Kariandni dropped the fire into her womb, for fire is *Bhagwan's* water. After nine months, Kariandni gave birth to the god *Hanuman*.

From that time, the Bhumia are able to make fire out of a bamboo by twirling a stick of hard wood in a hole cut in a piece of dry bamboo. This story too is obviously of Hindu origin. The Bhumia may have learned it from *sadhus* (Hindu religious mendicants), who visit the source of Narbada on pilgrimage, or from Brahmins who live in the villages along the Narbada river.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This scene is reminiscent of the begetting of Sasta through Shiva, when Vishnu (*Bhagwan*) transformed himself into the siren Mohini and danced before Shiva.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to find that D. P. Khanapurkar (Unpublished MS, p. 418) relates a similar myth current among the aborigines of Gujarat:

## 3. THE SALVATION OF MANKIND FROM FIRE AND FROM HUNGER

The world had been firmly established and *Dharti mata* had come to stay permanently in Singar dip. There were the Pandava brothers in Singar dip, Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin, and also the Gond (whom the Bhumia call *kisan*, cultivators), and a Domar (sweeper). But at that time the men had no grain; only Janki mata had grain. Janki mata is also known by the name of Sita, the wife of Rama. All the men lived in the town of Jodhia. However, they had no baskets and did not know how to store grain.

At last, Janki mata, who had six fingers on one hand, cut off the sixth finger and stuck it into the ground. After some time a bamboo grew out of the finger, with many knots between the hollow tubes. In the hollow tubes were all kinds of seeds: *kodo*, *kutki*, *barbati*, *urda*, *ramtila*, *dhan*, *juar*, *arhar*, *marria*, *kang*, *badra*, *jhunjhru*.

One day, Chandu, the pig of the Domar, was roaming about in the jungle, searching for food. It came to the bamboo which had grown out of the finger of Janki mata. The pig bit into the bamboo stem and made a hole in it. With what result? Grain fell out from the inside of the bamboo. The pig exclaimed: 'But that is grain! I shall come here every day to eat of it.'

At home in the pig-sty the Domar found grain in the dung of the pig when he went to clean the stable. He went out and followed in the track of the pig till he found the bamboo in the jungle. He split the bamboo open, found the grain and took it home. There was so much grain in the bamboo that the Domar and all the men of his village had to carry grain for a whole month till the bamboo was empty. All their houses were chockfull with grain.

Meanwhile, Nanga Bhumia also went around the jungle in

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The god who desired to possess Parvati was called Babrya. He was the family priest of Mahadeo, appointed to worship *Bhawani mata*. He too was killed by placing his hand on his own head. His hand was adorned with the ash-ring of Mahadeo *Bhasmakara* which had great magic power. Any living being could be burned to ashes if the ring was placed on its head.



search of roots, plants and jungle fruits for food. He found the empty bamboo and from it cut off small splints, with which he saw he could make a basket. Ever since then, the Bhumia know how to make baskets and grain bins. But later the Dhulia (professional basket-makers and musicians) also learned to make baskets and the Bhumia can now make baskets only for their own use. They cannot sell them in the bazaar like the Dhulia, or else they too would be regarded as 'untouchables'.

After a long time, when the people had already learned how to grow *kodo*, *kutki* and *dhan* (paddy), mankind became very bad. Therefore, *Bhagwan* decided to burn the whole world. The Pandava brothers heard him talking to himself about this plan and said: '*Bhagwan*, when you burn down the world, where shall we, meanwhile, remain?' *Bhagwan* replied: 'Make a hole in the earth and hide there. When the earth will have cooled down, you can again come out.'

Now Chandu, the pig of the Domar knew a charm by which future events could be foretold (*sagun mantri*) and thus found out the secret intention of *Bhagwan*. It told the Domar that *Bhagwan* was going to set fire to the whole world. The Domar said: 'If everything gets burned, how shall I escape? All my grain will also get burned. What shall we then eat?' The pig advised him: 'Fill all your grain into a huge bag and tie the bag on my back. Then you yourself, your whole family and all your relatives climb on my back. I shall save you.' After that, Chandu the pig dug a deep pit in the ground and with all the grain and the Domar went into hiding in the pit.

When the moment came for *Bhagwan* to burn the world, Bhimsen took a long iron bar (*gazar dang*), such a bar which the land surveyor (*patwari*) uses for his measuring. Bhimsen stuck the bar into the ground and widened the hole by turning the bar in the hole this side and that. Then he, his brothers and his mother Kotma *ma*, as well as Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin, went through this hole down into the depths of the earth.

Then *Bhagwan* sent his fire over the world. For two and a half hours the fire raged on the earth and destroyed every-

thing: plants and animals and the Gond.<sup>12</sup> After a while, when the earth had again cooled down, the Domar emerged with his family, his relatives and his pig. He went home, built himself a new house and ate the grain which he had saved from the conflagration.

The Pandava brothers with their mother, Nanga Baiga and his wife too, emerged from their pit. But they had nothing to eat because they had not been as clever as the Domar. They found that everything had been burned. There was nothing left to eat. For six years they went without food and at last felt very hungry. Bhimsen waited till the Sun rose from the ground and addressed the Sun in the following words: 'Suraj, we have nothing to eat. Do you perhaps know somebody who could give us some grain? You go all over the world and see everything.' The Sun replied: 'I have seen that the Domar has grain.' Bhimsen said: 'Go once more and see if the Domar really has grain.' The Sun went and found that the Domar indeed had grain. He told Bhimsen of the fact in so many words.

Bhimsen went at once to the Domar. He took very big steps, covering a distance of twelve *kos* (24 miles) with one step. He asked the Domar: 'Brother, give me some grain.' Domar raja replied: 'You can have some grain, but you must return everything that you borrow. And you have to return the grain in exactly the same manner in which you remove it. If you take it from the hole at the bottom of the grain bin, you must refill the bin through the hole at the bottom. If you take the grain from the top of the bin, you have to fill the bin at the top.' Bhimsen promised to fulfil all these conditions. The Sun (*Suraj*) promised to stand security: 'If the Pandava brothers do not return the grain, I shall pay it back.' The Moon also stood security, not only for the Pandava brothers, but also for Nanga Baiga and his wife.

Domar raja then said: 'I shall give you grain, but first you must eat with me.' Bhimsen replied: 'How can I eat with you? You belong to a different caste. So I shall go back and

<sup>12</sup> A tradition about such a punitive conflagration is current also among the Munda. Cf. S. C. Roy (1912): p. ix f. Hoffmann-van Emelen (1941): Vol. 12, p. 3319.



consult Kotma *ma* about it.' He went home to his mother and his brothers and said: 'Domar raja is ready to give us grain if we first eat with him.' Kotma *ma* said: 'Yes. It is right. You all can eat with the Domar.' Bhimsen said: 'I shall call Hawa Pawan, the wind, to blow away all the food from the plates.' Thus all went to the Domar and accepted his invitation to a meal. The Domar had many pigs which had also been saved from the general conflagration of the world. They had entered the pit after the pig Chandu. Now the Domar killed one of these pigs and the Domarin cooked the meat for the Pandava brothers. And she also prepared rice (*bhat*) for the guests.

When dinner was ready, all sat down in a row. The Domarin brought leaf platters which she distributed to all, and then served the food. The Domar served the pork. But the Pandava brothers and their mother Kotma *ma* did not eat. How could they, since they belonged to a different caste? Only Narayan *deo*, who was a small boy at that time, took a handful of rice and a piece of pork and ate it. Bhimsen called Hawa Pawan who came and in a whirlwind swept away all the food from the plates. The Pandava brothers pretended that they had eaten their food. But Nanga Baiga did not even pretend. He had been sitting apart and nobody noticed that he had not eaten anything. His food also had been blown away by Hawa Pawan.

The Domar now gave them some of his grain, for he really believed that all had taken part in his dinner. At home, Kotma *ma* asked her sons: 'Who ate food served by the Domar?' Narayan *deo*, the small boy, who had felt hungrier than his bigger brothers and had not tasted food for six years, replied: 'I ate food served by the Domar.' The Pandava brothers said to him: 'Because you ate the food of the Domar, you cannot any longer live with us.<sup>13</sup> From now on you must live and eat separately. Go to the houses of men who will come into the world in future; they will worship you and

<sup>13</sup> A substantially similar story is current among the Korku of the Melghat (Berar). See Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. 3, pp. 552 f. But there it is Bhimsen who eats the contaminated food and in revenge afterwards destroys the house of the outcaste host, a Mang.

kill a pig on their door-steps in your honour. This pig you may eat.'

Since that time, people perform the sacrifice of a pig on the door-step of their houses in honour of *Narayan deo*. This sacrifice is called *laru kaj*, the wedding of the pig.

When the Pandava brothers had eaten the grain which they had borrowed from the Domar, they never dreamed of returning it to him. For how could they fill the grain bin by pushing the grain into the hole at the bottom of the bin? They returned, however, half of the borrowed grain. But because they never returned the other half of the grain borrowed from the Domar, the latter sometimes catches the Sun and the Moon and asks them to return the grain. For they had stood security for the Pandava brothers and for Nanga Baiga. On such a day, the Sun and the Moon get dark. As long as the eclipse lasts, the Bhumia are not permitted to eat rice (*bhat*). But because all men on earth shout: 'Release him! Release him!' ('*Chhoro! Chhoro!*'), the Domar releases the Sun and Moon after a while. The Bhumia shout like the rest of the people: '*Chhoro! Chhoro!*', but they do not perform any sacrifice as do the Hindus.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE SOLEMN PIG SACRIFICE

THE HEAD of every Gond or Bhumia family should perform every ninth or twelfth year a solemn pig sacrifice in honour of *Narayan deo*. Its purpose is to secure the god's protection for the family and house against sickness and misfortune. The god is worshipped in this particular manner to make the family prosperous and happy. Sometimes *Narayan deo* makes a member of the family sick, just to remind them all that the sacrifice is due. Through a soothsayer (*gunia*), the god makes it known that he expects the sacrifice of a pig (*laru*). The animal which *Narayan deo* wants to be sacrificed in his honour is a young unblemished male pig, and the sacrifice is accompanied by a rich and complicated ritual.

If the family can afford the sacrifice of a pig, then a pig must be sacrificed. If the family is too poor, *Narayan deo* will be satisfied with the sacrifice of a black cock. This sacrifice is performed soon after the promise is made to the god. Only the members of the family attend the ceremony; no guests from outside are invited.

Before the cock is killed, it is made to pick up some *kodo* grains. If it refuses to eat them, another victim must be provided. For it is a proof that the cock is not acceptable to the god. But if the cock picks up only a few grains, its head is pushed into a hole in the floor just inside the threshold of the main entrance of the house. Then the hole around the head of the victim is quickly filled with mud till the cock dies of suffocation.

As soon as the cock is dead, it is taken outside into the courtyard and its head is cut off. The blood is allowed to drop to the ground. Then it is cut up, the meat is boiled in the house and eaten with a dish of rice by all the members of the family without any further ceremonies.

The ceremonial of the *laru kaj*, the solemn pig sacrifice,

however, is a more elaborate affair. It is not celebrated primarily to effect a cure from sickness, but to secure the prosperity of the family through the intervention of *Narayan deo*. The illness of a member of the family, supposedly caused by the god, is only the occasion, not the motive for the sacrifice. The pig sacrifice is called *laru kaj*, 'the pig's wedding'. According to my Bhumia informants, it signifies the wedding of the pig with *Narayan deo*. My Gond informants, however, said that the *laru kaj* is *Narayan deo's* wedding feast. It is not the wedding of *Narayan deo* with the pig; for *Narayan deo*, they say, is in the pig when it is sacrificed. The pig represents *Narayan deo*. *Laru kaj* means wedding.<sup>1</sup>

The sacrifice of the *laru kaj* should take place every ninth or twelfth year, while at intervals of three or five years a chicken must be offered in place of a pig. But actually the sacrifice is not performed so often. At least in the villages along the Narbada, this pig sacrifice is now rarely celebrated. At Bijora, a village five miles from Dindori, one Bhumia only had performed it in the last thirty years. It had been performed, however, oftener by the Gond of the village. But in the remote villages of the interior, the *laru kaj* is still regularly performed both by the Gond and the Bhumia. There are several reasons for the omission of this sacrifice in the villages along the Narbada: The performance of this sacrifice is rather expensive, and few people can at present afford to spend so much money. Further, with the growing Hindu influence, pigs are gradually disappearing. The performance of the pig sacrifice is discouraged by social reformers. Gond and Bhumia are very sensitive to ridicule or disapproval, and they particularly fear the loss of social prestige if they continue to perform ceremonies to which high-caste Hindus strongly object. At some places, they have therefore

<sup>1</sup> The Hindi word *laru* means 'beloved', 'bridegroom'; in this sense it is still widely used by the Bhil of Central India who call the bridegroom *laro* and the bride *lari*. The word is certainly related to the word *larka*, boy, which is a common Hindi word.

*Kaj* is a Sanskrit word and means 'work', 'ceremony'; it has the same meaning as *kriya*. *Kaj*, in the sense of 'wedding' or 'marriage' is used at least by one tribe in northern India, the Tharu. Cf. D. N. Majumdar (1932): pp. 146 ff.



substituted a goat for the pig, but more commonly they omit the sacrifice altogether. Since the sacrifice is nowadays rarely performed, people are likely to forget the exact ritual. And then they are afraid to perform the ceremonies at all, lest they make a mistake and omit certain essential rites. They are afraid that the god would punish them if the rites were not performed in proper order. They, therefore, prefer to omit them altogether to making a mistake.

In eastern Mandla, the *laru kaj* is performed not only by the Gond and Bhumia, but also by the other aboriginal and semi-aboriginal tribes, and even by some non-tribals. Nevertheless, it is easy to show that this sacrifice is a typical Gond rite. The Gond have spread over a much wider area than any of the other aboriginal tribes with whom they are in contact. Wherever Gond are found, the *laru kaj* is performed, with local variations, it is true, but with all its essential elements. We come across this pig sacrifice not only in Mandla, but also in parts of Gondwana where the Bhumia are not numerous, as in Chaurassi (north-west of Mandla), and in the former Rewa State (where the Raja, a Parteti Gond, is supposed to perform this sacrifice every year. In former times, at least, he had to eat the meat of the sacred pig without using his hands, taking the food with his mouth from a cloth folded seven times over). The *laru kaj* is also performed at Drug<sup>2</sup>, in the former Bastar State<sup>3</sup>, and as far west as the Nimar District in Madhya Pradesh. If this sacrifice were a Baiga rite, we could expect it only in areas where the Baiga are at home or where they were settled in the past. They are not found in the Nimar District, nor in Bastar State. It is not likely that the Gond adopted this rite from the Baiga or some other aboriginal tribe in Madhya Pradesh and later spread it among all their various sub-groups. There is remarkably little social and cultural exchange between the various Gond sub-groups.

It is not known from whom the Gond adopted this sacrifice. Its ritual is in many details similar to the famous Vedic horse-sacrifice, the *ashvamedha*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. Bhagwat (1944): p. 95 ff.

<sup>3</sup> V. Elwin (1947): p. 185 ff.

## 1. THE DEDICATION OF THE PIG

As soon as the soothsayer has pronounced his verdict that the persistent illness of a member of the family is due to *Narayan deo* the decision to perform this pig sacrifice can be taken any day of the week. My Bhumia informant, Musra, said that *Narayan deo* usually sends a chronic fever to remind his clients that a sacrifice should be performed. Musra himself was advised by the *gunia* to perform a *laru kaj* because after his father's death his mother and wife were struck with fever and could not recover. But as soon as he had taken the vow to perform a *laru kaj*, both patients recovered.

When a Gond or Bhumia has made up his mind to offer a pig in sacrifice to *Narayan deo*, he selects a young male pig, about a month old, from his own litter or from that of another man if the latter is willing to sell the animal to him. The animal must be very young, because it should never yet have covered a sow. The animal need not be a domestic pig. The Gond and Bhumia sometimes catch young wild pigs which they rear with their herds. Such pigs can also be selected for sacrifice.

On the day of dedication to *Narayan deo*, the head of the family likewise invites the brother or father of his wife. The pig selected for sacrifice is brought and the head of the family pours some rice on the ground before the animal. If the pig eats the rice at once, it is accepted as a sign that *Narayan deo* is well pleased with the choice of this particular animal. If the pig refuses to eat the rice, it is coaxed for a while, but in the end the rice is forced down the throat of the stubborn animal. When the pig has swallowed the rice, the head of the family prays: '*Yeh tor hai, Narayan*' ('It is yours, Narayan'). Along with the *laru*, another young pig is dedicated in the same manner. Instead of the second pig, a cock is sometimes chosen. The cock must be white in colour, according to some, and red, according to other informants. This animal is called *surja* (belonging to the Sun) or *sanghi* (mate). It is dedicated to the Sun-god, *Suraj Narayan*, who is supposed to be *Narayan deo's* brother.

After the dedication of the pig, the *nat* relatives of the cele-



brating family cut off two inches of the tail and a piece of the right or left ear of both victims. Then they castrate the animals, cutting a part of the phallus (*sutiya*) and crushing the testicles between two pieces of wood. The parts cut off are buried inside the house near one corner of the main entrance.

The sacrifice of the pig takes place any time after the dedication ceremony, but usually a year at least is allowed to pass between the dedication of the pig and its sacrifice. They cannot wait too long, for if the boar gets too strong, they may find it difficult to kill it according to customary rites.

As one informant told me, the *laru*, as it is called after its dedication to *Narayan deo*, and its mate, are not allowed to run free with the other pigs. At least the *laru* is kept locked up in a shed or enclosure (*gura*). According to other informants, however, the *laru* is allowed to graze with the herd. But it is specially looked after by the mistress of the house to whose care it is entrusted. The *laru* is well fed; it gets all the leavings of the family's meals. In the evening it is served like any other member of the family with a dish of *kodai* on a leaf platter. This food is cooked with the food of the family. On the day of dedication to *Narayan deo* the pig is served first, before the members of the family. On the days following its dedication it is served last, after the family members have received their plate of *kodai*. It is the task of the women to feed the *laru*; only if the women are absent, does this task fall to a man or boy. Neighbours and fellow-villagers, however, do not seem to treat the sacred animal with deference; they chase it away if it comes into the courtyard or garden.

If the *laru* dies or is killed by a tiger or by a snake, another animal must be provided in its place. But my informants said that a *laru* is never attacked by wild animals or killed by snakes; for it is grazed by *Narayan deo* himself (*Narayan ka charaita*). Even if the *laru* goes astray and does not return to its sty for the night, its owner does not worry or search for it as he would do if another animal had not returned before darkness. He is quite sure that no harm will befall *Narayan deo's* charge.

If the man who dedicated the pig to *Narayan deo* with the promise to sacrifice it in due time dies before he can fulfil his promise, his son or another near relative must perform the sacrifice. If no male relatives survive, the sacrifice is omitted. The widow or daughter of the man who made the promise cannot perform the ceremony.

As long as the *laru* is in the house, *Narayan deo* is supposed to abstain from striking any member of the family with sickness. But the presence of the pig will not prevent a disease caused by nature or by another deity, though *Narayan deo* is expected to help in such cases as well.

## 2. THE SACRIFICE

The sacrifice of the pig can be performed at any time of the year, except in the month of *Baisakh* (April-May) when no offering (*puja*) is performed to any god. The pig sacrifice should take place on a Tuesday or Saturday. The best time for its celebration is soon after the harvest when the grain bins are full and there is money in the house.

A few days previous to the real feast, the nearest relatives of the celebrating family, members of their own kin as well as relatives by marriage, are invited to attend the sacrifice. All caste fellows of the village also must be called, and often also neighbours and friends from the surrounding villages. The number of guests from outside naturally depends on the wealth and hospitality of the celebrating family. If a man has plenty of grain in his house, he may invite many guests. A poor man calls only his nearest relatives and the caste fellows of the village. To avoid any embarrassment to the host, no uninvited person may turn up for the banquet that follows the sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

On the morning of the feast day, (according to other informants, however, in the late afternoon ) when all the outside guests have arrived, the celebration of the *laru kaj* begins with the sacrifice of the pig or cock dedicated to the Sun-god.

<sup>4</sup> The same rule is observed for weddings; but not for funerals. For a funeral banquet uninvited guests must also be accommodated.



The victim is taken outside into the garden (*bari*); a small patch is cleared and a few grains of *kodo* are poured before the victim (*surja*). It is made to eat the grains. As soon as it starts eating a man cuts off its head with a *pharsa* (ceremonial axe). The man who kills the animal is either the head of the celebrating family himself, or another elderly man, preferably the village priest (*dewar*). The body of the victim is put aside, before its head the gum of the *Sarai* tree (*Boswellia thurifera*) is burned as incense (*hum*). The officiating priest prays: 'He Suraj deo, tai lai le' ('Sun-god, take what is due to you').

After that, the body of the victim is cut up, and the meat boiled in a pot and eaten with rice or *kodo* (*bhat*).

After the sacrifice to *Suraj deo* (Sun-god) the *laru* itself, dedicated to *Narayan deo*, is chased by several men, caught and brought to the door of the house. There, three flat cakes of *urda* (*Phaseolus radiatus*) are placed before its head. The cakes are as big as a hand and are baked in *ramtila* oil (*Guzotia abyssinica*). The flat cakes are taken between two sticks and pushed into the mouth of the pig as it greedily snaps at them and swallows them. The cakes are not served by hand for fear of a bite by the pig.

As soon as the pig has swallowed the cakes, its snout is painted with turmeric (*hardi*), as in a wedding. Then it is dragged to the threshold of the main door. The struggling victim is thrown on its back upon a broad heavy beam of *Saj* tree (*Terminalia tomentosa*) pushed across the door-step. Its front legs are tied together, then its hind legs. One man now pulls the front legs of the pig over its head with a strong rope, while another man pulls the hind legs in the opposite direction. At last another equally heavy beam is placed across the belly of the pig. Then five men at either side of the beam (some inside the room, some outside) press their whole weight on the beam; and thus crush, with their combined weight, the animal between the two beams. Rocking up and down, they keep their balance as they hold on to the door posts and to the walls of the house. While the men kill the pig in this manner, someone pours boiling water into the mouth of the victim. If the animal does not die at once, another man

takes a rice pounder and with it beats the pig's head.

At some villages, the pig is killed by another method. After tying the legs of the victim, it is lifted by the hind legs and its head is pushed into a hole filled with boiling water in front of the door. The pig's head is then several times bumped into the hole with great force. Then the hole around the head is quickly filled with mud, which is rammed down vigorously till the victim ceases struggling and dies of suffocation in the mud. It is believed by the aborigines that *Narayan deo* is in the pig at the moment of its sacrifice.

While the men kill the pig, others chant the following song:

*Tari nana re, Tari nana re* (three times)

Your grandmother, your grandmother

*Chaki tuma khola de—mein pani jaun* (twice)

Water gourd open I for water go

*Marek pade dukri,*

Frog emit gas, old woman,

*Mein pani jaun, han han, mein pani jaun*

I for water go, yes yes, I for water go

*Nau bandhna supa ke, das bandhna dauri ke*

Nine times bind with the winnowing fan, ten times bind  
with the basket

*Dauri ke bhat par, sau bhandari baba mein pani jaun.*

On a basket of rice, by a hundred magicians, I for water go.

#### FREE TRANSLATION

Oh your mother's mother! Oh your mother's mother!

You may apply the charm of the water-gourd, I shall go to the well.

May the frog belch, old woman. I shall go to the well.

Yes, yes. I shall go to the well.

You may bind me nine times with the winnowing fan, ten times with the basket

On a basket with rice, by a hundred mighty magicians, I shall go to the well.



This song implies that a man is dissatisfied with his old wife, and is looking for a new one. He expects to find her at the well where all the women and girls of the village assemble. This song is perhaps the mildest form of obscenity which, as the Gond admit, is shouted and sung by the men and women attending the sacrifice of the pig. The women also throw water at the men, pelt them with refuse and mud, and abuse them. My Bhumia informants, however, deny that their women indulged in obscene songs when they celebrated the *laru kaj*. Rather the women sit quietly on the veranda or inside the house and take no active part in the celebration. When the master of ceremonies, the so-called *bhandari*, begins singing verses with a bawdy colouring, the Bhumia women are supposed to leave and listen no longer. All this I was told by my Bhumia informant, Musra. What he told me may be true for Bijora, but it is doubtful if it also applies to other villages.

While the pig is sacrificed, the master of ceremonies invokes *Narayan deo*, his five brothers (the Pandava) and their mother, Kotma.

The man who acts as master of ceremonies in this celebration is usually the official village priest (*dewar*), but if he is absent or for any reason unable to lead the function, another man may take his place. Often the *samdhi* (the father-in-law of one of the celebrating family's sons) is called to officiate. When the Bhumia celebrate a *laru kaj*, the master of ceremonies (*bhandari*, i.e. wealthy man, or a man who bestows gifts) must always be a Bhumia though he need not be a Dewar. But when the Gond perform a pig sacrifice in honour of *Narayan deo*, the *bhandari* must be a Bhumia if such a man is available. Only if no Bhumia who is able to supervise the *laru kaj* can be found is a man of the Gond caste invited to act as master of ceremonies. If the village priest acts as master of ceremonies, the *samdhi* or *nat* relative of the celebrating family acts as the *bhandari*'s assistant. As such he is called *sonwani*. While the *bhandari* supervises everything and gives orders, the *sonwani* sees to it that they are carried out.

At the time when the *laru* is killed, the men often sing the following song:

*Taranak nani re taranan nana re* (three times)  
Your grandmother Your grandfather

*Ajo nyota re Narayan ke re* (three times)  
Today is the feast of Narayan

*Kekhar nyota o—mein jahon, baya, kekhar nyota re?*  
Whose feast is it? I shall go, sister, whose feast is it?

*Phir ajo nyota o Narayan ke hein—ajo nyota re*  
Further, today is the feast of Narayan—today's feast

*Bhagwan ke hein, ajo nyota ho ajo nyota re*  
*Bhagwan's* is it, today's feast, today's feast

*Kaunsa bolein aj jo nyota ho ajo nyota re*  
Who says whose today's feast it is—today's feast

*Khorin khorin re kotwar phire*  
The village paths the watchman wanders

*Hath men nyota kotwar dedhai*  
Into the hand the invitation the watchman gives

*Chala, bhaya, Narayan kaj ma, chalo, bhaya re*  
Let us go, brother, to Narayan's wedding, let us go, brother

*Kekhar karman re tain khathas bhaya tore karman re*  
Whose dinner will you eat, brother, your dinner

*Mein khathaun dadi tore karman o mein khathaun bahini*  
I shall eat, sister, your meal I shall eat, sister

*Tore karman re mein khathaun dau*  
Your banquet I shall eat, brother

*Phir tore karman re mein khathaun, Bhagwan*  
Further, your banquet I shall eat, Bhagwan

*Phir tore karman re mein khathaun, Narayan.*  
Further, your banquet I shall eat, Narayan.



## FREE TRANSLATION

Oh, your grandmother, oh, your grandfather!  
 Today is the feast of *Narayan*.  
 Whose feast is it? I shall go, sister.  
 Whose feast is it? Today again is the feast of *Narayan*.  
 Today is the feast of *Bhagwan*, today is his feast.  
 Through the village lanes the watchman wanders,  
 Into each hand he gives his invitation, the watchman.  
 Let us go, brother, to *Narayan's* wedding, let us go, brother.  
 Whose banquet shall I eat, brother? Your banquet.  
 I shall eat, sister, at your banquet.  
 I shall eat, sister, at your banquet.  
 I shall eat, brother, at your banquet.  
 I shall eat, God, at your banquet.  
 I shall eat, *Narayan*, at your banquet.

The word *karman* can have different meanings: work, fate, luck, destiny, business, action. Here it obviously signifies the banquet which is provided in honour of *Narayan deo's* 'wedding'.

As soon as the pig has breathed its last, it is taken outside into the garden behind the house. There it is held over a fire and its hair is singed. While the hair on the back of an ordinary pig is never burned, but pulled out and afterwards sold to the Domar, the hair on the back (*jhundia*) of the *laru* is burned with the rest of the hair. After the singing, the men carry the victim back into the courtyard, where near the veranda of the house (*parchhi*), an oblong pit has been dug which is called *narda* (lit. gutter, drain. It is a Sanskrit word). Stout planks are laid over the pit and over them a bamboo mat. The pig is placed on the mat and scrubbed clean. Then it is carried into the house and laid on a heap of big leaves. There the pig is cut up; its head is severed from the body and laid aside, the liver and the intestines are also cleaned and washed. The phallus of the pig is cut out and thrown into the *narda*. If any drops of blood are spilled on the floor, the mud soaked in it is carefully removed and also thrown into the pit. But it is said that the *laru* usually bleeds very little—it is too fat.

Meanwhile, a square portion of the floor near the wall in the house of the celebrating family has been cleaned and coated with cattle dung or with white clay (*chuhi matti*). Then with rice or wheat flour, a swastika (*chauk*) is drawn on the clean spot. The design consists of two cross lines only, forming an X. In the centre where the two lines cross, they pour a small pile of uncooked rice. This pile is called *punja* (sacrifice). At the side of the *punja*, but still on the *chauk*, they place the head of the pig in such a position that its snout points upward towards the *phulera* hanging over it. Then a thin slice of the pig's fat is cut off from its back and put into its mouth. It is sometimes covered with its own entrails.

Now what is called the *phulera* is made. A small mat is plaited of *parwaha* reeds (a kind of grass). The usual sitting mats (*chattai*) are of the same material. Long strings of white cotton wool are now tied to the four corners of the mat, then the ends of the strings are gathered and tied around three *parwaha* reeds which are driven into the wall just under the roof. Then they make a leaf platter (of *mohlain* leaves), put five *urda* cakes (flat cakes, as big as a hand with outstretched fingers, baked of *urda* flour in *ramtila* oil) on the platter. Taking up the four corners of the leaf platter, they wrap the cakes in it and put the bundle on the mat hanging about two feet over the ground. The leaves of *mohlain* (*Bauhinia rahlii*) are big, soft and thick, and frequently used for wrapping things up. Instead of *mohlain* leaves, *bel* leaves may also be used.

The head of the *laru* pig is not placed on the mat; it would be too heavy.

At the four corners of the mat threads hang down, about two feet long; to each thread they tie two *bel* leaves, one in the middle and another at the end of the thread.

The whole arrangement is called *phulera* (flower). According to my informants, it has the same significance as the *marwa* post in a wedding. Indeed the *laru kaj* is a wedding, as I was told by Panga, an old Bhumia of Bijora, performed between the pig and the *phulera*. Musra, my other Bhumia informant at Bijora, also said that the *laru kaj* was



*Narayan deo's* wedding, but he did not know to whom *Narayan deo* was wedded. It appears that in this rite the pig takes the place of the god *Narayan*. It is almost like a mystery play. *Narayan* is believed to be present in the head of the pig, in the pile of rice on the swastika drawn on the floor, in the urda cakes and in the *phulera*. The god comes and stays in the *phulera* to accept the offering. Because the god is present in the *phulera*, it should not be touched by anybody, once it has been hung up: it is sacred.

When the swastika is drawn on the floor and the *phulera* hung up over it, the *bhandari* with some men chants the following song:

*Konse ninde konse gore, kon bandhe kyari?*

Who weeds? Who loosens the soil? Who heaps the soil?

*Malhin ninde, malhiyan gore, Narayan bandhe kyari.*

The Malhin weeds, the Mali loosens, *Narayan deo* heaps the soil.

#### FREE TRANSLATION

Who weeds? Who loosens the soil? Who tends the plants?  
The gardener's wife weeds, the gardener loosens the soil,  
and *Narayan deo* tends the plants.

In this song, Malhin is probably the servant and consort of *Burha Nang*, the king of the snakes and master of the nether-world. The Malhin and her husband (the gardener) are supposed to look after the garden in Utra khand. *Narayan deo* is supposed to complete her work on earth, for the benefit of the crops.

The Gond sing a different verse in reply to the question: Who weeds, who loosens, who heaps the soil around the plants? They sing:

*Ishwar ninde, Brahma gore, Narayan bandhe kyari.*

God weeds, Brahma loosens, *Narayan* heaps the soil.

After this song, a leaf cup is filled with a mixture of *mahua* flowers and water and placed near the pile of rice on the swastika with the words:

*Saja ke chhali aur mahua ka lasa, Narayan karai mand  
ka asa*

Bark of *Saja* and *mahua* flower, *Narayan* feels desire for liquor.

The words allude to the origin of liquor as related in the myths: *Mahua* flowers fell from a tree into the hollow trunk of a *Saj* tree and there fermented under the warm rays of the sun into liquor. The *mahua* flowers in water are accepted by *Narayan deo* as liquor.

Now that all the paraphernalia for the offering are ready, the master of ceremonies (*bhandari*) leaves the house, undresses and squats down on a plank laid across the *narda* (pit). Another man pours water over his head and the *bhandari* takes a bath. Meanwhile, other men spread leaves on the ground like a carpet. It leads from the *narda* to the *phulera* in the house. After his bath the *bhandari* is solemnly led to the door of the house. Before it he stops and puts his right or left foot on the door-step. A man sitting inside the door strokes his foot with a bunch of *dubh*<sup>5</sup> grass stalks, then pours water, after it *ramtila* oil and finally milk on his foot.

With the *bhandari* is a boy, about ten years old, whose foot is washed and anointed in the same manner. Afterwards, this boy has to sit near the *phulera* until the last ceremony has been performed. He has no other task than to guard the *phulera*; he may go to sleep on the floor, but he must never leave his post. He is usually an unmarried boy and need not be a member of the celebrating family.

The role of this boy is not only that of a guardian of the *phulera*; but he has also to take upon himself afterwards the blame for killing the pig. The ceremonies performed towards the end of the whole celebration suggest this.

During the washing of the feet of the *bhandari* and the boy some men sing the following song:

*Dubha leao, dubha leao, ghora ka bachha, dubha leao*

Bring *dubh* grass, bring *dubh* grass, mare's filly, bring *dubh*

<sup>5</sup> The *dubh* grass is sacred all over India. Cf. H. Crooke (1926): Vol. I, p. 49; Vol. II, pp. 29, 45.



*Dubhan ma pay pakhare*  
Wash the foot with dubh

*Deo jat singasan dari mare, kundanwari*  
The god's carpet seat beat, woman (who beats)

*Jal leao, jal leao, mansa ka bachha, jal leao*  
Bring spring-water, bring spring-water, man's child, bring  
water

*Jalan pay pakhare*  
Wash the foot with spring-water

*Deo jat singasan dari mare, kundanwari*  
Beat the god's carpet seat, woman (who beats)

*Tela leao, tela leao, Teliya ke bachha, tela leao*  
Bring oil, bring oil, oil-presser's child, bring oil

*Telan pay pakhare*  
Wash the foot with oil

*Deo jat singasan dari mare, kundanwari*  
Beat the god's carpet seat, woman (who beats)

*Dudha leao, dudha leao, Ahira ke bachha, dudhal leao*  
Bring milk, bring milk, milkman's child, bring milk

*Dudhan pay pakhare*  
Wash the foot with milk

*Deo jat singasan dari mare, kundanwari*  
Beat the god's carpet seat, woman (who beats)

*Ajo sanichar pujari rachantri*  
Today Saturday the night of the sacrificer

*Dubha dhare balwanti*  
Put down the powerful dubh grass

*Motiya rang rang chauk puraye*  
A pearl-coloured swastika has been drawn

*Sahab baith Narayan asan.*  
Sit down, Lord Narayan, on the throne.

## FREE TRANSLATION

Bring dubh grass, bring dubh grass, mare's filly, bring dubh grass,

Wash the foot with dubh grass.

Beat the carpet on the god's seat, beating woman.

Bring spring-water, bring spring-water, man's child, bring spring-water.

Wash the foot in spring-water.

Beat the carpet on the god's seat, beating woman.

Bring ramtila oil, bring ramtila oil, child of the oil-presser, bring oil,

Anoint the foot with oil,

Beat the carpet on the god's seat, beating woman.

Wash the foot in milk,

Bring milk, bring milk, milkman's child, bring milk,

Beat the carpet on the god's seat, beating woman.

Today is Saturday, the night of the sacrifice,

Take down the dubh grass full of magic,

A swastika has been made of coloured pearls,

Take your seat on the throne, Lord Narayan.<sup>6</sup>

This song is an invitation to *Narayan deo* that he may come. Everything is prepared for his reception: *dubh grass* (*Eleusine caracana*), the sacred grass full of magic, which grows on the meadows where the horses graze (therefore the allusion to the mare's filly), water from a spring (*jal*), *ramtila* oil, and milk. It appears that the *bhandari* receives the welcome which is really due to *Narayan deo*. A woman is called to clean the carpet on which *Narayan deo* is to sit on his

<sup>6</sup> After the verse, *Dudha leao, dudha leao...* the Gond add another verse:

*Kara liyan, kara liyan, kalara ke bachha, kara liyan,*

Bring liquor, bring liquor, Kalar's child, bring liquor,

*Kerahin paun pakhare*

Wash the foot in liquor

*Deo jat singasan dari mare, kundanoari.*

Beat the god's carpet, beat, beating woman.



throne. . . . For each service a special servant is called, as in the palace of a king.

After the song, the *bhandari* is led to the *phulera*. A leaf plate with boiled *kodai* (*bhat*) and pieces of boiled liver are offered to him. The *bhandari* sprinkles the *kodai* rice on the pile of rice (*punja*) in the swastika and throws some pieces of the liver on it. During this offering the men sing:

*Urd munga ki kichhri, piphri ke dar*  
A broth of urda and mung, and piphri pulse

*Jaun, Narayan, jaun le, khanda bhar rat.*  
*Narayan*, eat the whole night.

At the same time, while the *bhandari* is offering rice and liver, the head of the celebrating family and all his male relatives are also offering rice and pieces of liver.

Finally, the *bhandari* sits down near the *phulera*, guarding it. Then the other guests approach and one by one place a copper coin on the pile of rice on the *chauk*, making the while obeisance to *Narayan deo*. The money collected in this manner is afterwards given to the *bhandari*.

Meanwhile, a meal is being prepared; *kodai* is boiled and the meat of the *laru* cooked in a huge vessel. The *kodai* is made into *bhat*, the liver of the pig is cooked separately. The meat of the pig is cooked by the *bhandari*, the rice by his assistant, the *sonwani*. The host himself does not do any work, but he supplies the provisions for the dinner.

When the cooking begins, the following incantations (*mantra*) are recited with great speed:

*Lakh awe aur lakh jawe lakh ke bhed koi na kare*  
A hundredthousand come and a hundredthousand go, no  
one can count a hundredthousand

*Ek bariha chauwal Narayan ke punja ma*  
One basket of rice is sufficient in *Narayan's* sacrifice

*Sab tinon lakh ka byira kelwa.*  
To feed three hundredthousands.

*He Bhagwan aur he Narayan, satya tumhara hai*  
*O Bhagwan and O Narayan, the truth is yours*

*Tinon lakh admi bilkul pujaue*  
*For three hundredthousands the rice may be sufficient*

*He Bhagwan, tinon lok ka raja hai.*  
*O Bhagwan, you are king of the three worlds.*

This is a charm (*mantra*) which is recited to increase the quantity of the provisions to such an abundance that they suffice for the entertainment of all the guests. There is always great anxiety lest the meal be too scanty and the host be blamed for lack of hospitality and generosity. If the host who celebrates the *laru kaj* is not in a financial position to defray all the costs of this feast, his relatives and clan fellows may help him out. But no other guests may be asked to contribute towards the expenses of the dinner which is given on this festive occasion.

When dinner is ready, all the invited guests come and sit down on the veranda or in the house, for this meal may not be served in the open courtyard. It should be taken under the roof of the celebrating family's house. It is already late at night when everything is ready for dinner.

All portions of the *laru's* body are eaten, even the liver and the heart, though some portions of the fat may be put aside and melted into oil for use, in the earthen lamp (*diya*), in religious ceremonies.

After this sacrificial meal liquor is served, but sparingly, as my Bhumia informants—not very convincingly—told me. They insisted that in a Bhumia *laru kaj* only old men and women are served liquor, not the young people, who are advised to go to sleep soon after the dinner. Having filled themselves with the meat of the *laru* and with much rice and pulses, they now feel drowsy. But the Gond admit that after the meal they do a lot of drinking, singing and dancing all throughout the night till dawn. It appears that the other tribes of eastern Mandla, who also celebrate the *laru kaj*, follow more the custom of the Gond than that of the Bhumia—in Bijora.



Everything that remains over after the meal is collected and preserved in the oblong pit (*narda*) in the courtyard for the following day. For after the performance of the concluding ceremonies on the following day another dinner will be served to the guests. The leavings of the meal, leaf platters, bones, etc. may not be thrown to the dogs, but must be buried in the *narda*. The water in which the cooking pots are washed must be poured into the pit; guests, when washing their hands and feet after dinner, do it over the pit.

One informant (Panga) told me that there is often a break in the succession of the ceremonies after the first day. No ceremonies are performed on the following day; the guests are merely entertained and dine on rice and pork. But on the third day the feast comes to its conclusion. However, not every host can afford to feed his guests for three days; if the host is not prepared or not in a position to entertain his guests for so long, the concluding ceremonies are performed on the evening of the second day.

At night, or whenever there is a lull in the festivities, the *bhandari* with the boy and the *sonwani* stay near the *phulera*. They take their turns in guarding it against prowling animals.

On the morning of the second, or, as the case may be, of the third day, after all the guests have done with their toilet and again assembled at the house of the celebrating family, the ceremonies are continued. Two men approach the boy who was all the time sitting or lying near the *phulera* and grasp his right leg. The *bhandari* takes a plate on which are grains of raw rice floating in water. Holding the leaf plate (*pan*) with both his hands, he waves it in a circle over the boy's foot, while the two men holding the boy's leg move it simultaneously in a circle. Then the *bhandari* pours the contents of the leaf platter over the pig's head in the swastika. While this ceremony takes place the men sing:

*Urd munga ki kichhri, piphri ke dar*  
Broth of urda and mung, and piphri pulse

*Jaon, Narayan, jaon le, khanda par rat.*  
Eat, Narayan, eat throughout the night.

While the *bhandari* and the other men sing these verses with many repetitions, the two men holding the boy's leg suddenly push his foot with great force against the pig's head on the swastika so that it tumbles over and falls backwards. At once the men lift the boy to his feet and carry him out of the house. Others take the head of the *laru* and put it on a heap of green leaves. There they crush the skull bones, take out the brain and with the other fleshy parts of the head throw it into a big earthen vessel. Then they carefully gather the pile of rice on the *chauk*, called *punja*, and pour it also into the pot. The skull bones are also put into the pot which is placed over a fire. When the meat is sufficiently cooked in the rice, a meal is served to all the guests in the house. This meal goes by the name of *mun-bhojan* (memorial meal). According to some informants, the meat of the *laru's* head may not be eaten by women, but only by men.

When the meal has been served, the wife of the host approaches her husband and formally asks him for her reward (*bhani*). For since its dedication the *laru* had been in her keeping and she had to look after it well. The host asks his wife: 'What did you graze, a cow?' She replies: 'No, not a cow, but the *laru*.' The host then gives her a piece of pork and some rice. The meat of the *laru* is also sent to friends and prominent caste fellows in distant villages who, for some reason or other, were prevented from attending the feast.

After the meal, which is again taken inside the house, the guests begin to grow boisterous and garrulous and indulge in practical jokes. The host puts the pork of the *laru* and rice on a large leaf platter and carries it to the *bhandari* who is standing near the *phulera*, holding in his hand a strip of the *laru's* skin. This skin is cut from the back of the pig; it is about three feet long and four inches broad. Two men now begin to dance around the host, all the time trying to snatch some morsels of meat from the platter which the host is holding in his hands. The *bhandari* chases them away, beating them with the strip of skin and hitting them hard! All the people watch this scene with intense pleasure. During this dance the *bhandari* sings the following verses:



*Nandi tir ki harna, a tau le sing dhar dhar*  
Bring the horn of the deer, killed with a small bow

*Nach, bo Jamma ke tir.*  
Dance, holding the bow of Jumna.

According to some other informants, the *bhandari* takes the bladder of the *laru*, blows it up and ties it up with a string. With the bladder and the strip of skin in his hand, he begins to dance with the boy who had been guarding the *phulera*. The boy dances around the *phulera* and all the while snatches bits of the rice and meat from the plate which the host has placed right under the *phulera*. The *bhandari* beats him with the pig's bladder and the strip of skin from which the hairs have not been removed. These hurt the boy as they get stuck in his back and cause a swelling. The *bhandari* dances with the boy till both are breathless.

The exact meaning of this ceremony and of the verses sung during the dance is not clear. But from another song, collected by D. Bhagvat (unpublished MS), it is clear that the 'deer' is the *laru* pig. For the *laru* is called in the song the 'deer of Singar dip'. The *bhandari* addresses the alleged killer of the *laru* and requests him to show his trophies, i.e. the horns of the deer, killed with a bow at the riverside of the Jumna (river in Uttar Pradesh). The *bhandari* consequently accuses the boy or the two men (as the case may be), for having killed the *laru* and pretends to punish them by beating them with the strip of skin and the bladder of the *laru*. As he chases them around, he makes them 'dance'. The intention of the whole ceremony is to deceive the spirit of the sacrificed animal as to the true identity of the slayers of the pig.

This deception is carried further by the ceremony that now follows: Some of the men begin to break a hole through the wall near the door and all (first the dancers and then the onlookers) escape through it into the courtyard. After a while all return; but this time they enter the house by the door.

In my opinion, this is again done to deceive the spirit of the slain pig: They pretend that the persons who are now

entering the house by the door are other than those who escaped from the room through the hole in the wall.

Now some boys come riding on hobby-horses made of sticks with rags tied around the top-ends as heads. They beat the people sitting around the *narda* pit with the tail ends of their hobby horses. They pretend to come from far, riding around the *narda* and are chased by the *bhandari*. Then they pretend to ride away; at some distance they throw their hobby-horses and return.<sup>†</sup>

After that the *bhandari* takes the *phulera* down and with the skull bones places it on a leaf platter. The string netting in which the *phulera* had been hanging is cut into small pieces. The *bhandari* hangs a longer piece around his neck and slings it around his ear, after the manner of the high-caste Hindus when they go to relieve themselves. The other strings are cut into small pieces and tied together to form each a wristlet of three rings, linked one into the other. Each male guest is given one. He puts it on his left wrist. This wristlet is called *Narayan deo ka janew*, *Narayan deo's* sacred thread.

This done, the *bhandari* takes the leaf platter with the *phulera* and the skull bones of the *laru* outside and throws everything into the *narda* which is then quickly filled with mud and made level with the ground.

The *bhandari* then returns to the house and sits down on the door-step. He calls for the wife of the host and asks her for alms. She asks him: 'Where do you come from?' In

<sup>†</sup> This again, I think, is meant to impute to the spirit of the pig that strangers coming from afar had killed it and that the people sitting around the pit were not responsible for it.

The use of the hobby-horse is common in eastern India. The Muria and Maria Gond of Bastar use hobby-horses in religious ceremonies and also when they attend great festivals. Cf. V. Elwin (1953).

The hobby-horse is very popular in West Bengal. Cf. B. K. Sarkar (1917): p. 111.

In Orissa, hobby-horses are used in religious ceremonies in the *Sāhiyātrā* festival, for instance. A hobby-horse is called *Chhait Ghoda* (lit. the horse that is ridden in the month of *Chaitra*, i.e. March-April). The Bhaktas decorate their bodies with vermillion and then standing on two sticks (or hobby-horse) dance with various gestures. Cf. B. K. Sarkar (1917): p. 92.



reply, the *bhandari* begins singing, asking himself questions and supplying the answers.

*Kone desh se aye, Brahman, kon desh tum jate?*  
From which country do you come, Brahman, and where  
do you go?

*Agom desh se aya hun, pachum desh ka mein jata hun.*  
From east I come and to west I go.

*Anand dhan lelo, Brahman, chhor de dharm dwara,*  
This happy gift take, Brahman, leave the rightful door.

*Sahib, chhor de dharm dwara*  
Lord, leave the rightful door.

*Andhan tor gharu bal hai. Nahin chhorun dharm dwara.*  
Thy house is good. I shall not leave the rightful door.

*Bhoribra<sup>8</sup> ke sewa karun, jiw kar, dan mein paun.*  
Bhoribra I serve, and find my living by begging.

After that, the wife of the host gives him about ten pounds of *laru* pork. This portion has been put aside for this very purpose. The *bhandari* also receives about two pounds of rice, and a few silver or copper coins. The value of the gift depends on the generosity and wealth of the host.

After this last ceremony all the guests take their leave. Before departure, however, they are served a last glass of liquor.

<sup>8</sup> Bhoribra is probably *bhuribraj*, the 'much shining one', i.e. the Sun. The *bhandari* appears in the song as a Brahmin mendicant.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### F E A S T S

#### 1. CHERTA

THE CHERTA festival, which is also called *Khichhrahi*, is celebrated by the children of the Gond, Bhumia, Panka and even of the Hindus living in eastern Mandla. On the morning of the last day of the month of *Pus* (in the first half of January) children between the age of six and fourteen go in small groups from house to house, each with a stick in hand. Usually the children of one hamlet (*tola*) go together on this begging tour. They enter the courtyard of every house, beat the ground with their sticks and shout: '*Cher cherta, kothi ke dhar herta, banrhi murgi marta*' ('It is Cherta. Look for grain in the bin, and kill the tailless chicken'). The meaning implied is that the woman of the house should take some grain from the bin and even kill a chicken for the mendicants.

At every house, the children, boys and girls, receive each a handful of *kodo* or maize, some salt, or sweets. After they have collected their gifts from every house in the village, the children proceed to a nearby river or pond. There they prepare a meal from the foodstuff which they have collected. The boys fetch firewood, the girls husk the grain (*darna kutna*). Then they put all the grain, *kodo*, *kutki*, maize, and whatever they have received, into the same pot and cook it. Such food is called *khichhri*.

As soon as the meal is ready, the children perform a ceremony which is called *kawa banana*, 'to make one a crow'. A boy or a girl is chosen to act as the crow. Some food, usually roasted maize (*lai*), is put on a leaf-platter, and placed on the ground a short distance from the group. Then the boy or girl acting as the crow approaches from the other side to take the leaf-platter. At that moment all the children rush at the



'crow' and beat it with burning faggots. The 'crow', surrounded by a crowd of shouting children, angrily 'caws' at them a few times, and at a convenient moment snatches the leaf-platter and runs away.

After that, all the children sit down peacefully and eat their meal off the leaf plates. Towards evening they all return home.

This feast is called *Cherta mangna*, 'asking for gifts'. The day is a feast and holiday for children, but adults also sometimes join in it. The children who take part in the feast must fast the whole day till they get their meal at the river. The fast is called *khichhri upas*, 'the fast for the *khichhri*'.

## 2. GANESH UPAS

On the first day of *Magh* (the fullmoon day of January or February) the *Cherta* festival is celebrated. There is a feast, two, four or five days later in honour of *Ganesh*, the elephant-headed god of the non-tribals. This feast is observed by the Bhumia, Gond and all other tribes and castes of eastern Mandla. It is obviously borrowed from the Hindus, as neither Gond nor Bhumia worship *Ganesh* on any other occasion, nor do they know any hymns in praise of the god.<sup>1</sup>

The feast is preceded by a fast. This fast is not obligatory; any man or woman who feels an urge to fast in honour of *Ganesh* may observe it. It is obligatory, however, for the man who is going to perform the offering to the god at the climax of the feast. The feast is very popular among the younger generation of the aboriginals. They even observe stricter fasting rules than the Hindus, for they abstain from eating and drinking until evening. Though they are allowed to smoke tobacco, they may not chew it. Nor should they take *pan*. In addition to this, a fast includes further restrictions: they may not beat a bullock or cow, nor quarrel with any one, or swear and use obscene language in conver-

<sup>1</sup> The worship of *Ganesh* (*Ganesa*) is very popular all over India, but especially in the Deccan and in the South. The ritual of worship is in its essentials the same as that performed by the Gond and Bhumia. Cf. V. Barnouw (1954): Vol. 56, pp. 75 ff.

sation. When Hindus fast, they are allowed to drink water or milk, and to eat fruit.

Towards evening, the fasting men and women go to their usual bathing place and take a bath. It should be, if possible, at a place with running water. After the bath they change their clothes. Then, on a smouldering dung cake, a *hum* sacrifice is performed: coarse cane sugar (*gur*) or the gum (*rar*) of the *Sarai* tree (*Boswellia serrata*) is burned in offering. Then the fasting men and women return from the river with a vessel full of water. It must be water from a river or from a spring (*jal*), 'living water'. At home the vessel is placed near the water stand, a little apart.

As soon as the moon rises, the veranda before the main door (*angana*) is given a coating with cow-dung and white clay. Then with rice flour a swastika (*chauk*) is drawn on the centre of the veranda. No other flour but rice flour may be used for it. On the swastika, they place an earthen bowl full of *ramtila* oil. A wick soaking in the oil is lighted. A little to the right they place the vessel with the spring-water. Then a crude figure of an elephant, with four legs, a tail and a trunk, is moulded out of cow-dung. On the elephant, they place the figure of a man, called *mohatia ashwar* (elephant driver). Then the fasting men or women bring four rice cakes (*godala*) baked in *ramtila* oil, break them into crumbs before the figure of *Ganesh* and pray: '*Ganeshji, hamare jiw achchha rakh. Kuchh taklif jaen*' ('God *Ganesh*, keep us in good health. Let all troubles vanish'). And then coarse cane sugar (*gur*) is burned in offering on a dung cake.

After that, the burning lamp (*diya*) is carried into the house and placed on a sill built in the wall. All the members of the family now sit down and eat rice cakes. On this occasion no rice gruel (*bhat*) should be eaten. The persons who had been observing the fast may still not drink any water except from the vessel placed near the sacred swastika. When the vessel is empty, it is placed again at its usual place near the big water vessel (*gara*).

After dinner all go to sleep. At cock-crow next morning, however, all those who had been fasting take their *lota* (pear-shaped brass vessel) and a burning dung cake and go to the



sacred swastika on the porch. Holding the *lota* and the dung cake in the right hand, they take the figure of *Ganesh* with the left hand and proceed to the bathing place. There each person places the vessel and the smouldering dung cake on the ground, and holding the figure of *Ganesh* in the left hand, wades into the water. They dive down till the whole body is submerged in the water. The clay figure in the hand soon melts away in the water.

After the bath, another *hum* offering is made. Then the *lota* is filled with water and carried home. At the house each fasting person offers rice gruel and *urda* pulse (*urda ke dar*) and on the veranda burns *hum* on the swastika. Then all the members of the family partake of a meal of rice gruel and *urda* pulse. Sometimes friends and relatives are also invited to this meal.

My informant, Musra, told me that this is the only occasion when *Ganesh* is worshipped by Gond and Bhumia.

Near Mandla, the ceremonies performed on this occasion by the Gond are more elaborate. Fr. van Helvert, a Catholic missionary, described them to me thus:

The fast is kept by the head of the family, the same person who is also to perform the offering. During the day the fasting persons play ball to pass the time and forget their hunger. In the evening the man moulds out of cow-dung a small figure of *Ganesh*, about three inches high. He places it on a wooden stool (*pilhri*) against the eastern wall of the house, about one yard from the north-eastern corner. Then he ties a *janew* (sacred thread) around the figure: Over the left shoulder across the chest and under the right arm. He winds the sacred thread three to five times around the figure. This *janew*, an unbleached cotton thread, is obtained from a Mehra (weaver) for a handful of rice and a few pies. This thread is received by all Brahmins at their initiation. It is tied around the figure of *Ganesh* because the god is considered to be a spiritual teacher (*pandit*). After that water is sprinkled on the figure, clarified butter (*ghee*) is burned on a small fire in front of the figure and the smoke wafted towards it. The head of the family makes obeisance before the figure (*paon parna*) and prays to *Ganesh*: 'O *Ganesh*, keep us hale

and hearty; we have fasted, now that you are pleased, keep us in good health.'

After that the head of the family takes some leaves of the thorn-apple tree (*bel*, *Aegle marmelos*) and some stalks of the sacred *dubh* grass. Then he forms two cups of *mohlain* leaves, into one he pours milk, into the other some sesame (*til*) oil. Into both cups he also drops bracelets or rings. Now taking in one hand the *bel* leaves and in the other the grass blades, he dips both into the cup of oil, crosses his right hand over his left and thus touches the figure of *Ganesh* on the head at two places. Then he crosses his left hand over his right and repeats the ceremony. Again he crosses the right hand over the left and touches the figure on both shoulders. The same ceremony is repeated after dipping the leaves and grass blades into the milk.

After this a coconut is broken, and a small piece of it thrown into the fire burning in front of the figure of *Ganesh*. Another piece of the coconut and two small pieces of bread baked in oil (*chila*) are offered to *Ganesh* with the prayer to preserve the whole family in good health.

Meanwhile, the women of the house prepare *kodo* and mix it with wheat flour. This they fry a little; mix it again with some clarified butter, a few crumbs of coconut and some sugar, and prepare a sweetmeat called *laddu*. These they all eat with enormous gusto. But before the meal begins, the head of the family takes a silver ring or another piece of silver between his joined hands, goes outside and, facing the east, stands in front of the figure of *Ganesh*. A small patch of the floor is coated with fresh cow-dung. While someone pours a few drops of milk on the silver ring, the head of the family bows low and touches Mother Earth with both hands on the spot coated with cow-dung. Then he lifts his hands to the Moon (a deity) and prays that the whole family and his relatives be kept in good health. This he repeats three times.

During the dinner of *laddu*, or shortly afterwards, the small piece of coconut, which was offered to *Ganesh*, is distributed among the present diners as *prashad* (sacrificial gift).

Next morning, the women clean up the place where the offering was performed. They take the clay figure of *Ganesh*,



the shells of the offered coconut, the two leaf cups and carry everything to the well where they throw the things away somewhere east of the well. But the two pieces of bread they eat. Then they sprinkle water over the figure of *Ganesh* and disperse to their homes.

Children observe a similar fast four days after full moon day in the month of *Bhado* (August-September). The children fast the whole day and eat only when the moon rises. Before their meal, a coconut and a rice cake are offered in the courtyard, which is cleaned and coated with cow-dung for the occasion. After the offering, all the members of the family eat rice cakes fried in oil or clarified butter. But it is not clear why this fast is observed.

### 3. HOLI

This Hindu spring festival, also called *Phag*, is celebrated by the aboriginals of eastern Mandla as well. As a rule, however, they are ignorant of the significance of this feast. They see Hindus celebrating it; they imitate them, and adopt this feast as a pretext for having a good meal and plenty of drinks.

Holi is celebrated on the fullmoon day of the month of *Phag* (March). Two weeks earlier the village boys begin to collect fuel which they pile up at an open place on the eastern outskirts of the village.

Five days before the feast really begins, the village headman, accompanied by four to ten men and a band with drums and cymbals, goes to the place where Holi will be burned. The men erect a pole, about eight to twelve feet high. This pole they often take from the fencing of a garden. Then they dig a hole in front of the pole, bury an egg, a copper ring and one or several copper coins in it. They sacrifice a chicken which they cook and eat on the spot. After that they plant a short stick of the *Semur* tree (silk cotton tree, *Bombax malabaricum*) on the very spot where the offering was performed. Now they pile the bundles of firewood around the two poles and sprinkle diluted wheat flour on them.

During the next five days, the village boys steal fuel from

various houses, break planks from the fencings of gardens, and pile the wood up around the Holi pole.

On the feast day, at early dawn, all the villagers gather at the Holi pole in the east of the village. When the sun rises, the headman sets fire to the pyre. There is no sacrifice at this time. After a short while the Bhumia Dewar of the village approaches and collects a few handfuls of ashes from the pyre. He carries the ashes a short distance away from the pyre, puts them on the ground and makes obeisance before them. Then he takes the ashes and sprinkles them over the villagers. Now all start singing and dancing around the pyre, to the rhythm of drums and cymbals, squirting dyed water at each other. This is called *phag khelna*, 'playing Holi'. There is a mock fight, especially among *nat* relatives.

The villagers bring all their iron implements such as ploughshares, weeding knives, sickles, etc. to the Holi pyre and put them into the fire. Some people bring *chirra* grass (*Themeda laxa* Stapf.), tie the stalks into bundles, light them in the Holi fire, swing the flaming bundles over the head and throw them into the fire, saying: '*Khasi, khokli, rog ka lai jai, Rawan maharaj ka*' ('Coughs, colds and all the other diseases take away from us, great king Ravan'). Others bring a rope plaited from strips of the bark of the *Semur* tree, touch each other with its ends and then throw the rope into the fire. The significance of this rite is not known.

When the Holi pole and the shorter pole of *Semur* wood have burned down, the Bhumia Dewar digs out the stumps of the two poles. The stump of the Holi pole he throws back into the fire; from the stump of the *Semur* pole he cuts off a few chips, the rest he throws back on the pyre. Then he takes the chips one after the other, lights them and touches with the burning ends, from three to five times, the belly of each man and boy present. Women are not touched in the same manner. Then he throws the chips back into the fire. This is done to prevent people getting a stomach-ache.

Meanwhile, some men have been sent to drive all the village cattle, goats, buffaloes, etc. to the Holi place. When the Holi pyre has burned down, the men get their hot ploughshares and other iron implements out of the fire, fill a vessel



with water and pour the water over the hot iron on to their buffaloes. Each man performs this ceremony for his own buffaloes. It is believed that as a result of this rite, the buffaloes in the hot season will suffer less from the heat. Then they collect all their cattle, goats and buffaloes around the pyre, but do not throw mud on them or paint them as on Diwari. After that the animals are led back to the grazing ground.

When the pyre has entirely burned down, they dig for the coins and the copper ring which, as they say, represent the bones of the witch (Holika); according to Hindu tradition she was burned on the Holi pyre. At last they go to their fields and pluck green shoots of wheat, gram and *masur*. At that time of the year the winter crops are almost ready for the harvest. They collect the well-nigh ripe grains of wheat, gram and *masur* and eat them around the *phag* pyre.

Then all day long boys and girls pitch dust and refuse at each other, the girls pulling the loincloths of the boys and beating them with sticks, the boys retaliating with obscene and abusive words. Then they go in groups from house to house, sing and dance and beg for a few coins or some grain from the people. From the money collected they buy a bottle of liquor. But people also enjoy a good drink at home.

#### 4. JOWARA

Like most castes and tribes of Central India, the Gond and Bhumia also celebrate the very ancient Jowara feast,<sup>2</sup> the solemn offering of barley (*jaw* or *jwa* in Hindi—*Hodeum vulgare*) or wheat. If the people are wheat growers, they offer wheat, or else barley. The offering is made in honour of the mother goddess whom the village sorcerer (they call him *panda*) venerates as his tutelary goddess. Her name varies in different regions; in the villages around Dindori, the *panda* calls her *Marai mata*, *Vorasen devi*, also *Kali mata*. But whatever may be the name of the goddess, the offering in her honour is performed that she may protect the villagers from misfortune and disease, make their fields yield an

<sup>2</sup> Jowara, the 'o' is sometimes pronounced like 'a'.

abundant harvest and bless those whose marriage has so far remained without issue with children.

While some feasts are celebrated either within the intimate circle of the family, and for others guests from outside, relatives and friends and caste fellows, are invited, the Jowara feast is celebrated by the *panda* with the devotees of his tutelary goddess who have either received a boon in the past through the *panda's* intervention or who desire one in the future from the goddess. It is natural that the caste fellows of a *panda* should take a more active part in the ceremonies which surround this feast; if the *panda* happens to be a Bhumia, members of this caste play a conspicuous part in the celebration; if he is a Gond or Panka, Bhumia still take part, but to a less extent. All castes, except perhaps the highest and the lowest, take part in the celebration of this feast. It must be mentioned, however, that neither Brahmins nor Pardhan can ever become *panda*. These two castes do not worship *Marai mata*. I have this information from two Gond, Dhuri and Bhagal by name, from Bijora.

The Jowara feast is celebrated either in spring—ten days after Holi, or in autumn—ten days before Dasehra. It is then also called Nawratra ('the nine nights'). The Jowara feast in spring begins a few days before the new moon day in the month of Chhait (March or April). Since the celebration of this feast is a rather expensive affair for the *panda*, he performs all the ceremonies only once in three to seven years, and in other years only sacrifices a chicken, but sows no barley or wheat. A token offering at least must be made, however, else the *panda* would be punished by the goddess. He would die, or go blind, or his cattle would die.

On the day of the ceremonial sowing of barley, the *panda* receives the devotees of his *mata* at about noon near the *maria*. The *maria*, or *mandir* (temple), as it is also called, is a low hut with bamboo matted walls and a roof of leaves in which the *panda* keeps his tutelary goddess. For this celebration the walls and the floor receive a fresh coating with cow-dung and white clay. The raised platform at the side of the temple-hut, where a long pole stands, carrying a white flag—the sign of the *panda*—is also coated with a layer of



cattle dung and mud. This is the work of some pious women who are anxious to gain spiritual merit.

When all the devotees of the *mata* have arrived, they go singing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals to a field with rich black soil. There the *panda* cleans a suitable spot and then with a paste of wheat flour draws a square (*chauk*) about a foot in size on the ground. In the square, he draws two cross lines reaching from one corner to the other—this is the swastika. On this sacred design he puts two *paisa* (copper coins), a betel nut, and a few flat wheat cakes baked in oil (*puri*). Over the whole he pours as an offering a few drops of country liquor (*daru*). Then he takes a crow-bar and digs up the earth within the *chauk*, praying the while: 'Thakur deo, Dharti mata, Nanga Baiga, Nanga Baigin, mata ki sewa men tum sab madad dijiye' ('Thakur deo, Earth-mother, Nanga Baiga, Nanga Baigin, give us your help in the service of the mother-goddess').

A sister or a daughter of the *panda*, or another girl, now fills the folds of her dress with earth, and puts some earth also into a new bamboo basket (about 18 inches wide). This is known as *chatura*. Sometimes another basket is used or rather a combination of baskets. A fairly long and thick bamboo stick is taken, and at regular intervals chips about a foot long are cut out which with bamboo slivers, are plaited into basket-like containers, one above the other. These containers are now filled with black soil. Finally, the other people also take a handful of soil; all return to the shrine of the *panda*, singing hymns in honour of the goddess to the rhythm of the drums. At the shrine the *panda* breaks the heavy clods of black soil into fine grains, praying to his *mata*: 'Mata devi, in your honour I am sowing the barley. Accept our worship and do not disappoint us.' Then he fills the baskets with soil and sows barley mixed with wheat first in the name of *Thakur deo*,<sup>3</sup> then in the name of different mother-goddesses. For one *mata* he sows barley in an earthen pot (*kalsa*). Then he breaks a big earthen vessel (*gagri*), fills three potsherds with earth and sows barley mixed with wheat

<sup>3</sup> This holds good for a Bhumia *panda*. A Gond *panda* sows the seed in the name of *Bara deo*.

in them in honour of other goddesses whose names vary locally. *Dasahi mata* is one of them. He also sows grain in honour of *Hanuman* (*Marut*) and *Muni Baba*. According to other informants, the *panda* sometimes takes leaves of the *Mohlain* tree (*Bauhinia rahlii*), folds them into cups and stitches them together with two bamboo slivers. He then fills two such cups with black soil and sows barley in them. Some seeds of barley and wheat are also sown in front of his tridents (*tarsul*) in the *mandir* (temple-hut) and on the platform on which the sacred flag pole stands. This spot is known as 'the field of the gods'.

After that the *panda* ties some peacock feathers to a bamboo pole and sticks three iron arrow-heads into the feathers. This bamboo pole he ties to the flag-staff outside on the platform, and sticks into the ground an iron lamp-stand in the shape of an arrow-head. This pole now represents the *Marai mata* and is called *dagain*. The *panda* now places an earthen vessel filled with glowing coals before the pole, burns incense on the coals and sprinkles water on the pole. After this ceremony the devotees of the *mata* disperse and go home.

In the evening, the villagers again assemble near the temple-hut of the *panda* and salute the *mata* by touching, with joined hands, the ground before the *dagain*, then raising their hands to the forehead. Next they sit down outside in the courtyard on the raised platform under a shady tree (*chabutra*).

Some men now begin to sing religious songs in honour of the *mata* to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. Soon several devotees of the goddess fall into a trance and appear to be possessed by the *mata*. They dance around in wild irregular jumps and leaps and in the end sometimes fall to the ground in a swoon. Meanwhile, the *panda* lights some lamps on the iron stand near the sacred pole and burns incense before his goddess. He also waters the seeds in the pots and baskets.

For the next eight days the *panda* takes good care of his 'garden', burns incense before it and waters the seedlings three or four times a day. In the evening the villagers assemble at the temple-hut of the *panda* and sing hymns in honour of the mother-goddess. The seedlings grow well under



the good care of the *panda* and in eight days reach a height of about a foot and a half. But as the seedlings grow in the shade, they assume a yellowish tint and remain very delicate.

On the eighth day the feast comes to a climax. The wife of the *panda* prepares a good number of wheat cakes (*puri*) and places them in the *mandir*. All the clients of the *panda* assemble again at the temple-hut and sing hymns to the beating of drums and cymbals. The *panda* again burns incense before the sacred bamboo pole and his tridents, and offers a coconut and cakes, breaking the coconut and the cakes into small pieces which he throws at the pole, praying: 'O *mata*, today is your feast. Accept this offering from us and eat well.'

Meanwhile, the incessant singing and drumming of the devotees grows louder and wilder, and the whole crowd gets so excited that some begin to shake and tremble and fall into a trance. This is taken as a sign that the mother-goddess has taken possession of them and dwells in them. The men begin a wild dance in which also the *panda* joins, holding in his hands a rope plaited from the hair of a cow's tail (*saat*), a garland of dried fruits (*navara*) around his waist, and small bells sewn on a strip of cloth (*ghungra*) around his ankles. At last the singers and dancers get so excited that in a wild rush, the *panda* leading, they enter the temple-hut, snatch the wheat cakes (*puri*) and begin to eat them. Some cakes are taken outside and each man present is given one. Members of a caste who may not accept food from the *panda* receive pieces of the coconut previously offered. After eating the bread cakes, the crowd soon disperses and only the singers and drummers remain in the temple-hut to finish the rest of the cakes.

On the following day, the devotees of the *mata* and clients of the *panda* again assemble at noon in the courtyard of the *panda's* house. While his followers sing and dance, the *panda* offers incense to his goddess. Sometimes he sacrifices a male goat, cutting its throat with a *pharsa* (axe). The animal is usually quite young. After the sacrifice the *panda* carries the baskets and pots, with the wheat and barley seedlings,

into the open and puts them down in front of the temple-hut on a swastika drawn on the ground. Then he prays: 'Come, *mata*, you will now get a cold bath in the river. I have worshipped you for eight days; after your bath you will again take your place with me.' Then he sprinkles a few drops of milk on the plants, while some man takes the sacred pole of *Marhai mata* from the flagstaff and others lift the pots and baskets with the seedlings on their shoulders. A procession is formed in which the man with the sacred pole walks ahead. All proceed to the nearest waterplace or river. On the way the *panda* or some devotees again fall into a trance. Some *panda* in their ecstasy beat themselves with iron chains, or with iron balls on chains, over their back and on their arms. Apparently they are not much hurt by such terrible chastisement. They stick long iron bolts (*tarsul*) through the cheeks and dance with great abandonment.

At the river or pond the *panda* first offers a coconut. Then the men, carrying the baskets and pots with the seedlings, step into the water till it reaches their chest. This is called *ihanda karna*, 'to cool down'. Those who had their cheeks pierced take the iron spikes out without showing any wounds afterwards, nor do they feel any pain later. My informants had seen this often; but they admitted that only a few men could do this and then only when they were highly excited.

Before the baskets and pots are exposed to the water, the *panda* collects some plants; the others also take a few seedlings and stick them behind their ears. All then return to the house of the *panda*, singing and beating their drums. The baskets (*chatura*), now empty, are also taken home or thrown away at the river side. When the *panda* and his clients reach the courtyard of his house, the *panda's* wife steps forward and washes the feet of her husband. Now all enter and sit down on the platform (*chabutra*) under the shade of a tree. The *panda's* wife brings some gram (*channa*) and a stick of turmeric (*hardi*) on a big brass plate. On the plate also are a coconut and a burning earthen lamp (*diya*). With turmeric the woman marks the forehead of her husband and of all who, during the ceremony, fell into a trance. The *panda*



blesses her and gives her a handful of gram and some barley seedlings. Then he says, turning towards the sacred pole which the man still holds aloft: 'Come, Maharaj, let us go and visit the village.' Accompanied by the devotees of the *mata*, the *panda* visits every house of his hamlet. At each house he is received at the gate by a woman who washes his feet and then performs the same ceremonies of welcome which took place in the house of the *panda*. If any man in the crowd falls into a trance and starts dancing, the *panda* joins him in the dance.

After visiting all the houses of the hamlet (*tola*), the procession returns to the temple-hut where the *panda* again offers a coconut to his goddess with the prayer, 'O mother, whatever honour was due to you, has now been offered by men. Now do not disappoint us.'

It is now that a man often gets possessed by the god *Hanuman*. Not seldom he is a special devotee of the god who attends the *jowara* feast when he hears the drumming of the *mandar*. In his trance he sways about like a drunkard, and eats everything that people offer him: bread cakes, coconuts, etc. He even snatches the red bead necklaces (*gurya*) of the women and eats the beads. When he sees an earthen lamp (*diya*) he takes the cotton wick and eats it. But otherwise he is peaceful and composed; he does not harass people. Nor does he demand the offering of pigs and goats. If the *panda* has a sacred ladder in his courtyard (which is called *rasena*) the man possessed by *Hanuman* climbs it and jumps down from it on the *maria* platform. If people throw a coconut at him on the ladder he jumps at it. If he has a red turban (*pagri*) he takes it off and tears it into shreds. All through these antics the *barwa*—as such a man is called—does not speak a word. Sometimes he climbs the ladder and refuses to descend until the *panda* performs a sacrifice.

After this entertainment, the *panda* invites his clients to a dinner. The provisions for this meal are usually contributed by all the devotees of the *mata*. If previously, at the beginning of the procession, no goat had been sacrificed, it is now done by the *panda*. Before he kills the victim, he applies a

tikli<sup>4</sup> on its forehead. The meat of the slain animal is then prepared for the meal. Members of castes, who cannot eat with the Gond or Bhumia, are given provisions to prepare their own food. The caste regulations must be observed by all means and under any circumstances.

While the essential ceremonies of this ritual are the same all over Central India, details vary according to caste and region. Even in small areas there is no complete uniformity. That this feast is imported from outside is proved by the fact that barley is not at all an important crop in Central India. And the aboriginals of Mandla do not even sow much wheat which may be taken as a substitute for barley.

### 5. GHAILA

Ghaila is the name which the aboriginals of eastern Mandla give to the feast which the Hindus call Akdi or Akadhi.

On a day fixed by the headman of the village, of the month of *Jeth* (May or June), the Ghaila feast is celebrated. It is really a divination to find out how the monsoon of the year will turn out. This is how it is done. The headman of the village, usually a Gond, calls a virgin boy, preferably his own son, and tells him to fill an earthen pot (*ghaila*, with a measure of about five seers of water) at the well. The headman then takes the pot to his field. On a suitable spot in his field he puts his vessel down and then forms five clods of dry clay which he places in a circle. On these clods he places the water vessel. The five clods of clay represent the five months of the rainy season: the one in front is *Jeth*, then, turning clockwise, follow *Asar*, *Srawan*, *Bhadom* and *Kuar*.

Next morning, the headman calls all the villagers to accompany him to his field. The men take along a harrow (*thangra*), a yoke (*jowari*) and a pair of bullocks. On the field they tie the yoke to the harrow and yoke the bullocks. As soon as this is done, the *dewar* of the village, a Bhumia, is called to perform a sacrifice. He offers five chickens, two on the body of the harrow, and three on the ground in front

<sup>4</sup> A tikli is a star-like ornament which non-tribal women wear on the forehead on festive occasions.



of the harrow. First he makes the chickens eat *kodai* grain, and as soon as they pick up a few grains, he cuts off their heads with the axe (*pharsa*), praying: 'Thakur deo, hamare upar raksha kar. Dharti mata, hamare upar raksha kar' ('Thakur deo, protect us. Earth-mother, keep guard over us').

According to other information, only one chicken is sacrificed. When the bullocks are yoked, the *dewar* puts a few grains on the harrow blade. The chicken picks up the grains. The *dewar* holds the chicken and places the edge of the harrow blade on its neck. The bullocks are made to move on and start going. The *dewar* holds the body of the chicken, cuts off its head with the blade of the harrow and buries it in the ground.

After that the village headman drives the harrow three times along one length of his field. Then the other villagers also, one by one, drive the harrow in like manner. Then the bullocks are let loose. Meanwhile, the *dewar* has cut up the chicken and distributed the meat. Each one gets his share and the villagers, grouped according to their caste, prepare a meal on the spot. They cook rice (*bhat*) and the flesh of the chicken. After the meal the *dewar* takes a *bor* leaf (*Zizyphus jujuba*), dips it into water and sprinkles the water on a plough (*nangar*), and on all the people around, Gond and all.

Now all the men go and inspect the *ghaila*. The water seeping through the porous surface of the pot has soaked and partly dissolved one or more of the clods of clay on which the vessel rested. Whichever clod is dissolved in water indicates that in the month which it represents much rain will fall.

Gond as well as Bhumia have implicit faith in this divination. They are convinced that the *ghaila* accurately foretells in which month much rain will fall and arrange accordingly what seed they will sow in their fields. If much rain is expected in *Jeth*, they sow maize in the garden and paddy in the field, also *bhadela kutki*. If much rain is due in *Asar*, they start to sow *kodo* during this month. If rainfall will be plentiful in *Srawan*, they wait with the sowing until *Srawan* and then sow *urda*, *til* and *ramtila*. Before *Srawan*,

they simply harrow the field several times to keep it free of weeds. If heavy rains can be expected in *Bhado*, *ramtila* and *kutki* can be sown without fear. If not much rain is expected in *Jeth*, they wait with the sowing of maize until *Asar*.

The farmers are more than pleased if they can expect much rain in *Asar*. For then the soil gets well soaked with moisture, and a later spell of fair weather cannot do much harm to the crops. Less rain, however, is wanted in *Srawan*. If much rain falls in the month of *Asar*, they sow all their *kodo* during this month. *Kodo* should be sown in *Asar*, in order to get a fair harvest. Of course, if much rain falls in this month, the weeds also grow quickly so that the field must be harrowed once more before the sowing can start. If the month of *Asar* is dry, they wait with the sowing of the *kodo* till the beginning of *Srawan*.

In the month of *Srawan* they sow *urda*, *til* and *ramtila*, even if the rainfall does not come up to their expectation. For not much harm is done if it rains less in *Srawan*; but in the month of *Bhado* they want a heavy rainfall. The more rain in *Bhado*, the better for the crops. If the rain fails in *Bhado*, the paddy crop is a failure.

If there is much rain in the month of *Kuar*, the early crops suffer, since the flowers fall off in a heavy downpour or the plants do not flower at all for lack of sunshine.

My informants were ignorant of the influence of the weather on their health. But they admitted that in a monsoon with less rain the malaria attacks were more serious.

The *ghaila* ceremony is concluded with the drinking of a bottle of liquor. If the collection (*chanda*) made among the villagers for the purchase of liquor allows them to buy several bottles, so much the better. When the last bottle has been emptied, the farmers go home and patiently wait for the rain to come. The *dewar* is invited to the house of the village headman for a meal and for more liquor. He also claims the *ghaila* pot as his property.

The *ghaila* ceremony is also performed by many non-tribal castes of Central India. Most likely it is of non-tribal origin, and has been adopted by the Gond and Bhumia, like so many other customs and beliefs.



## 6. THE BIDRI SOWING CEREMONY

Every year, at the beginning of the sowing season, a solemn sacrifice is performed in eastern Mandla to obtain the blessing of *Thakur deo* for the new agricultural year and his protection for the whole village community against disease and other misfortunes. It is not always an animal sacrifice that is performed; often the god must be content with the *hum* offering. Since the sacrifice is addressed to *Thakur deo*, the officiating priest is always a Baiga (Bhumia); usually he is the official village priest (*dewar*).

The *hum* offering is performed in the following manner: A smouldering dung cake is placed before the stone slabs in which *Thakur deo* is believed to be present. Then gum is collected from a *Sarai* tree (*Boswellia thurifera*) and thrown into the fire with the prayer: 'He Bhagwan, *sal se hamko parkat de*' ('O Bhagwan, give us your blessing this year').

When an animal sacrifice is to take place, the villagers proceed in procession to the tree under which *Thakur deo* is housed. First, they put *kodai* (husked *kodo*) before the stone slabs. Then they pray that *Thakur deo* may give them an abundance of food and drink during the coming year. After this prayer a chicken is killed by pressing its head into the earth till it dies of suffocation. This victim is then put on the pile of seeds which the villagers have brought along. Then a white he-goat is led to the platform (*chabutra*) under the sacred tree and its mouth is pressed on the *kodai* grains which are placed on the platform. If the goat eats the grain, it is a sign that it is accepted by the god as a victim. If the goat cannot be brought to eat even a few grains, it cannot be sacrificed and must be exchanged for another animal. But this rarely ever happens. As soon as the goat begins to feed on the grains, the *dewar* takes hold of it and kills it with a heavy blow of his axe (*pharsa*). When the head of the goat is severed from its body, the blood is spilled on the ground around the tree and the head placed on the platform.

I once watched the sacrifice of a full-grown goat. It was difficult for a single man to hold the strong animal for the deadly blow. So they tied a rope loosely round its neck, slid

a fairly strong pole through the sling, and twisted it a bit. Then holding the pole in a horizontal position, they held the animal's neck and head rigidly straight. The goat circled slowly around the man who was holding the pole. He with the axe was standing outside the circle. When the goat approached him, he swung the axe and with a mighty blow almost severed the goat's head. Immediately several men rushed at the body, gripped the twitching legs and held the bleeding neck over the sacred spot on the platform.

After the sacrifice (or, if no animal is sacrificed, after the *hum* offering) a small area around the tree, a few square yards only, is ploughed up by hand with an iron ploughshare (*phar*). The ploughshare, which the Bhumia use, resembles a spear-head and may be mistaken for such. It is the privilege of a certain man in the village to plough this field of *Thakur deo*. It is called *khet*, i.e. field. After ploughing it, the man also harrows it with the iron blade of a harrow (*bakhar*). Then all kinds of seeds are sown such as *kodo*, *kutki*, maize, rice, one or two grains of *urda* and *til*. But no seed of the winter crops is sown. If the man, who does the ploughing, is absent at the time of the *bidri* ceremony, any other man of the village may perform this ceremonial tilling and sowing for him. Every villager brings some seeds along. These seeds are placed on the platform of *Thakur deo* and after the *bidri* they are taken home and mixed into the seed grain.

As mentioned before, the sacrifice of a goat is not performed every year, but once in two, three or four years. How many times a goat is sacrificed, depends on the wealth and generosity of the villagers, for the victim is bought by the money collected from all the villagers. If the money collected (*chanda*) is insufficient for the purchase of a goat, some red or black chickens are bought and sacrificed. In small villages, or in years when the previous crops have failed *Thakur deo* must be content with a *hum* sacrifice.

After the sacrifice to *Thakur deo*, other offerings are made in honour of his sons, particularly of *Ghamsen deo* to whom a red goat, or at least a red cock and fowl, should be offered. After that a black chicken is sacrificed in honour of *Prithwi*



*mata*, the earth-goddess. The chicken is suffocated by pressing its head into the loose soil. The flesh of the chicken is afterwards put into the same pot in which the meat of the other sacrificial animals is boiled. Then the *dewar* takes a mouthful of liquor three times and sprinkles it on the seed.

After that the *Bhumia dewar* distributes the seeds placed on the platform in front of the stone of *Thakur deo*. Each villager gets a handful of grain which he mixes into his seed grain. The rest is taken home by the *dewar*.

When all is done as the ritual demands, a meal is prepared for all those who took part in the ceremony. The meal is taken only by men; women are not allowed to attend. They eat the meat of the animals sacrificed with a dish of rice or *kodai*, and pulse (*dar*). The meal is taken near the shrine of *Thakur deo*. Nothing should be taken home.

Except for the *bidri* ceremony, the shrine of *Thakur deo* is rarely ever visited during the year. Even the seeds, which have been sown into the 'field of *Thakur deo*' and which grow up in due time, are ignored by the villagers. Grazing cattle eat them.

It is significant that the *bidri* ceremony must always be performed by a Baiga.<sup>5</sup> Even in tracts where scarcely any Baiga are found, a member of this caste is called upon to officiate at the *bidri* ceremony. It is for this task that a family of the Baiga tribe is invited to settle in each village, and the head of the family is paid a yearly allowance just for the performance of the *bidri* sacrifice. The Gond, too, call a Baiga-Bhumia for this sacrifice; they may not perform it themselves.

## 7. HARELI

Hareli or Hariri, as it is also called, is celebrated on new moon day of the month of *Srawan* (July-August). It is

<sup>5</sup> The Hill Bhuiya of Orissa, a tribe of which the Bhumia are said to be an offspring, perform a similar sacrifice which they call *bihira* or *bihura*. This festival corresponds to the feast of transplantation of paddy seedlings celebrated by the Munda and most other settled agricultural tribes of Chotanagpur and Orissa. Cf. S. C. Roy (1935): p. 246.

something of a spring festival. After the dry months of the hot season the monsoon sets in; every tree and bush is reviving, all vegetation begins to bloom and blossom. The peasants have ploughed their fields and sown their seeds. Now the brown nakedness of the fields assumes a green hue and soon the young plants will sprout.

A few days before Hareli, the village priest (*dewar*) goes to the paddy field and plucks a bundle of the thin, delicate seedlings. Then at every house of his village he sticks two or three stalks into a chink in the wall over the door of the house or stable. In return for this blessing every villager gives him a handful of rice, *kodo* or *kutki*.

On the morning of the feast day, before they go to their fields, the men take a bath, while the women give the house a fresh coating with cattle manure and white clay (*chuhi matti*). No one works on this day, and even the bullocks are given a rest. The men go and cut green twigs from trees and plant them in a corner of their fields. They wish and hope that their crops of *kodo* and *kutki* may grow as high as the twigs stuck in the ground. They burn incense on a smouldering dung cake and invoke *Anadai*, the goddess of the crops, to give them a plentiful harvest and to make them happy.

Then they collect twigs and leaves of bamboo (*bans jinji*), *hasiadapul* (*Baliospermum axillare*), *bhilwa* (*Semecarpus anacardium*), *yogilatti* (*Asparagus racemosus*), or of other plants like *banwarmali*, *babalati* (a creeper), *kargi*, and *bhagwadheri*. A bunch of these plants they stick in the ground in the centre of their fields, other bunches they take home and stick them into the wall over the door and at the gate which leads into the courtyard. Sometimes the Ahir is called to perform this rite.

At noon they have a meal of rice (*bhat*) and *dar* (lentils) and fresh vegetables which they pluck on Hareli for the first time in the new season. If they can afford it, they also buy a bottle of liquor which they drink before the meal. Before Hareli no Bhumia, Gond or Panka may eat any fresh vegetables or fruit, except those that are found in the jungle.

On Hareli, the cattle also are well fed and are given salt.



While elsewhere the agriculturists are said to wash their ploughs and other agricultural implements, in the villages around Dindori, Gond and Bhumia do not perform any such rite.

On this feast the village smith (Agaria) goes around the village with a bottle of liquor. He shares a drink with every man in the village. Then he hammers a nail into the door-step of the main entrance into the house, into one leg of a bedstead, into the grain-pestle and into the bottom of a *barria* (wooden grain measure). Panga of Bijora showed me a *barria* the bottom of which was studded with about thirty nails. This is supposed to bring luck. The same rite is performed on Diwari.

On the same day the boys begin to make stilts (*jeri*) and to walk on them. They play about pushing each other with the stilts and trying to throw one another into the mud. This is done in honour of *Jeri mata* that she may make the crops grow as high as the stilts are long. The boys also pretend to go on stilts in order to prevent the mud from getting between their toes.

On the fifth or seventh day of the following month (*Bhado*), the boys take their stilts to a river, preferably the Narbada, place the stilts in a heap on the river-side, then offer bread, burn incense or clarified butter before the stilts, and throw them all into the water. Boys in villages far from a river nail their stilts to trees at the village boundary.

It is not very likely that the Hareli feast is of Bhumia or Gond origin. For a similar feast, called Ekkadij, is celebrated by many agricultural non-tribal castes of Central India. The word *hareli* is commonly derived from the Hindi word *haryali* (greenness), but this etymology is doubtful, for *hara* (green) comes from the Sanskrit word *harita* which could never be developed into *hareli*.<sup>6</sup>

The Chenchu have a female high-god whom they call *Garelamaisama*, the ending-*maisama* denoting feminine character. The Telugu *g* often turns into *h*. Thus it is possible that the name *hareli* derives from the ancient word *Garela*, the high-god (or goddess) of the Chenchu who is venerated until present times through primitival sacrifices.<sup>6</sup> The *hareli*

festival of the Gond and Bhumia is essentially nothing but a primitive sacrifice of first fruits, but curiously not addressed to any god. Could it be that the name of the feast is derived from a former high-god long since forgotten?

### 8. NANG PANCHMI

Nang Panchmi, the snake feast, is celebrated by Hindus on the fifth day (*panchmi*) of the bright half of the lunar month of *Srawan* (July or August). The Bhumia do not celebrate this feast, but some Gond of eastern Mandla do.

Early in the morning the head of the family milks his cow. With the unboiled milk he goes to an ant-hill<sup>7</sup> and, pouring it into a hole, he prays: 'Take this, snake god, take' (*'Le, Nang deo, le'*). And he adds: 'Protect our fields.' Then he offers *hum*.

In the evening the men come together and sing endless songs in honour of all the gods. First they mention the gods of the upper world, like *Khero deo*, *Dharti mata*, *Thakur deo*, *Chhitla mata*, and *Hardulal deo*. Then they add a verse in praise of *Burha deo*, the snake god, and of all the other snakes, the *Kariya*, *Dudhiya*, the *Chhitti* snake, and the others. In one of the songs these snakes are brought in in connection with the growth of certain plants: red pepper (*mircha*), for instance, with the cobra (*kariya*), the *semi* (beans) with *Burha deo*, paddy with the *Dudhiya* snake, *karela* (a creeper with fruits which are prepared as a vegetable) with the *Gehunwa* snake, cucumber (*kakora*) with the *Chhitti* snake.

In another song the snakes are mentioned in connection with the wedding post (*marhwa*), and the ceremony of walking around it by the bridal pair. No doubt, the snakes have some connection with fertility in the mind of the Gond.

Eight days after Nang Panchmi, the Gond worship a god called *Kandeyaji*. They obtain a picture of the god from the merchant at Dindori and paste it on the wall in the house. On the evening of the day during which they observe

<sup>6</sup> Cf. C. von Fürer-Haimendorf (1943): pp. 279 ff.

<sup>7</sup> The worship of snakes on ant-hills is a Hindu custom and quite popular in northern India. Cf. R. Temple (1883-7): Vol. 3, p. 92.



a fast, they offer milk, burn *hum* and then have a good meal. Bhumia and Panka venerate the god in the same manner.

### 9. KUJLAYA

This feast is celebrated on the full moon day of the Hindu month of *Bhado* (August-September) and commemorates the final reunion of a legendary queen, *Malhana Dewi*, with her beloved daughter who had been married to the son of a hostile king, the murderer of her father. Nine days before fullmoon day, the girls and women of the village sow wheat or barley (*jaua*) at sunset in small baskets or brass vessels filled with black soil and manure. Each woman brings her basket to a house which has sufficient space for the storage of all the baskets till the day of the feast.

On the eve of the feast-day the women again assemble at the house where the baskets are kept in the safe keeping of the village priest. They are accompanied by their male relatives. At the house the women, after the fashion of the Hindu women on the feast of Rakhi,<sup>8</sup> tie strings (*rakhi dora*) around the right wrists of their brothers and cousins, taking care to exclude any man whom they might be in a position to marry one day. For by tying this string around the wrist of a man, a kind of spiritual relationship is formed which excludes a future marriage between the partners. For this reason, no woman may tie the Rakhi-string around the wrist of her husband or son. The purpose of this ceremony is to bring the blessing of *Malhana Dewi* on the man and his family. The men in turn give small presents of two or four annas to the women. The strings are usually bought in the bazaar and are made by men of the Lakhera caste.

The following day at about four p.m. the villagers again assemble at the house where the Kujlaya baskets are kept. The women, who prepared the baskets, bring milk along which they now sprinkle on the seedlings in the baskets; each woman sprinkling the milk on her own basket. Some villagers now offer coconuts. Then each woman takes her basket and all proceed in a procession to a nearby river. They sing the following song on the way:

<sup>8</sup> Cf. S. Fuchs (1950): pp. 313-15.

*Rakhi, Tija do pavan, Kujlaya ki ai bahar*

Rakhi and Tija are two feasts, now has arrived Kujlaya

*Sab ke betia bahini re ghar men karan antho raw*

The daughters and sisters of all are making merry at home

*Tumare bahini papi kare, Bhanda<sup>9</sup>, paradesh*

Your sister has sinned, Bhanda, in a foreign country

*Larkia na baio re, Allha,<sup>10</sup> Udhal nahi*

Allha and Udhal are boys, not girls

*To mein deti ghar barho viauh*

Else I would also have them married in a foreign country

*Kacheli tho, umsi chali ho*

Take the basket (?), and go

*Phatak kholo, Sri Bhagawan re*

Open the gate, Lord Bhagwan

*Attar ki tel do do sisian ho*

Two bottles of perfume

*Sancha ko charhao owke bog.*

Will be offered in the evening.

After reaching the river, the women sink the baskets and brass vessels in the water. The black soil melts away quickly, but the seedlings are collected by the women, washed and handed to one woman who distributes them among all the persons present. Every one sticks a few seedlings behind the ear. Meanwhile, one or several men break a coconut and offer it to *Malhana Dewi* in the name of all. The offering is made by breaking a part of the coconut into small pieces which are thrown at the bank of the river, invoking at the same time *Malhana Dewi*, while the rest of the coconut is distributed among the people present. After that all return home. The brass pots are washed in the river and taken home, often even the baskets.

On the way home the women sing the following song:

<sup>9</sup> Banda is the daughter of Malhana Dewi.

<sup>10</sup> Allha and Udhal are the sons of queen Malhana.



*Dhajane dhari Gaura julai ho*  
 Gauri (Parvati) is swinging with a flag  
*Mera julna men juli bhauro lal re*  
 On my swing the black-bee was swinging

*Gagara to phuthi ho*  
 The earthen pots were broken

*Ghatvayo ko lagakar dhoka re*  
 They were broken on the stone of the Ghatwala<sup>11</sup>

*Lili gorhi pathara aswar ho*  
 The one who rides the red horse is thin

*Lili topi lei le, dadu, sasurar,*  
 Take the red hat of the rider, father-in-law,

*Ha ho devi Ganga re*  
 Ha ho goddess Ganga

*Ayer chalo, gail chalo, hath liye lota*  
 Go hither, go thither, take your lota in the hand

*Dil ko Bhagwan liye.*  
 Take Bhagwan into your heart.

The Gond and Bhumia, like other aborigines and, indeed, even non-tribals, cannot stand for long the strain of high religious emotions. They soon resort to some sort of relaxation which is provided by the—for us perhaps incongruous—insertion of songs of a more worldly and often even improper type. They sing, for instance, the following verse:

*Rat kahe, doka lagai, aye nahi re*  
 He said that he would come at night, but he disappointed me  
 and did not come

*Vah Brahmana se, lagail Brahmana.*  
 Oh, that Brahmin.

<sup>11</sup> A huge boulder lying in the water, representing *Ghatwala deo* or *Bhainsasur*, the god of the water-buffaloes. The earthen pots in which the seedlings were brought to the water, are smashed on the boulder.

The following song sounds less improper:

*Unche attari men sasuri ko dera*  
In the upper storey lives the father-in-law

*Kalai sas-ji ke raj*  
Below is the mother-in-law who rules

*Kaho, raja, kholo kevaria*  
Speak, husband, open the door

*Lauto, to karon thera raj*  
Return and rule in your kingdom

*Mera sasura ke gase ko bangela*  
My father-in-law's house is of grass

*Ek rangi, doi rangi, ek chunnadar,*  
Of one colour, of two colours, but it is white-washed

*Mohania mohi reki*  
With pleasure I live in it

*Mera sasura ke tin to larka*  
My father-in-law has three sons

*Ek munsî, ek daroga, ek chaukidar*  
One is a clerk, one a police-inspector, and the third one a forest-guard

*Mohania mohi reke.*  
With pleasure I live in his house.<sup>12</sup>

The feast comes to a close with a festive meal at home. On this day many women form friendship unions with other women; this is known by the name of *sakhi* or *jawar*. They put a lac bracelet on each other's wrist, or tie a string (*rakhi dora*), and exchange the breast-cloth if they wear any, or the hair-string.

<sup>12</sup> These songs as well as the other particulars of the feast were supplied by Rev. Joseph Thaliath of Duhania.



## 10. THE NAWA FEAST

All castes of eastern Mandla celebrate this feast when the maize ripens towards the end of September or at the beginning of October. The feast is not celebrated by all the people in the village on the same day. Some celebrate it early, some a few days later, according to the state of their crops or their convenience.

First of all, the official village priest (*dewar*) must go to a field and collect a bundle of paddy stalks which he offers in the field to *Thakur deo*. He prays: 'Take this paddy, *Thakur deo*.' Then he carries the bundle to the village and sticks one plant into the roof of the veranda of each house in the village.

On the day when the family decides to celebrate the feast, the head of the family (*gharwala*) goes to the field and plucks out a handful of paddy plants from any field, his own or another's. It must be paddy, not *kodo* or *kutki*. The plants should be green but should already have ears. With the plants a Gond goes to a *Saj* tree (*Terminalia tomentosa*) in the village—to any *Saj* tree; it need not be the one which houses *Bara deo*, as this tree is generally at some distance from the village. At the *Saj* tree, the Gond offers clarified butter and incense, and the ears of the paddy. Then he goes home and performs a similar offering before *Bhawani mata* on his veranda, to *Holera deo* in the cattleshed, to *Narayan deo* on the door-step and to *Rat mai* on the veranda. A *Bhumia* performs the offering first in honour of *Thakur deo* under the tree sacred to him.

After the offering, the head of the family takes the green grains from the ears and mixes them with the rice (*bhat*) which has been prepared for dinner. The meal is prepared from the rice of last year, but a few grains must be of the new crop. This dish of rice must be prepared by the mother, wife or daughter-in-law of the man who brings the plants. A daughter of the house is not permitted to attend the cooking on this day. There is no obligation for any member of the family to fast; but all take a bath before they sit down to dinner.

According to my *Bhumia* informants, the offering takes place

immediately before the meal. The head of the family or another man in the house takes a big leaf and folds it with its smooth inner side outwards. Then he places the leaf on the floor and pours a handful of boiled rice on it. Behind the leaf with the pile of rice on it he draws a circle with rice flour and sticks a paddy plant into its centre. Then taking some rice from the pile of boiled rice on the leaf, he pours some on the plant, saying: '*Le, Narayan deo*' ('Take this, *Narayan deo*'). Then he pours some more rice on the plant and says: '*Take, Dulha deo,*' and '*Take, Dulhin devi.*' To *Rat mai* also he offers rice in this manner.

After that wealthy Gond and Bhumia drink a bottle of liquor; poor people have to do without it. Then they partake of the meal. This dinner is called *nawa khana*, the eating of the new fruits. Though maize, and other garden products, may be eaten before the Nawa feast, pumpkins (*mewa*, *kalimdar*, etc.) and grain crops may be prepared for food after the Nawa feast only.

## 11. DASEHRA

The Gond and Bhumia of eastern Mandla are ignorant of the significance of this Hindu feast. They take this feast, however, as the occasion for religious ceremonies which have no inner connection with Dasehra. Thus the Bhumia sacrifice a cock or a goat at *Ghamseu deo's* shrine. No sacrifice is performed in honour of *Thakur deo*. The goat or cock is offered only if sufficient money can be collected by public subscription (*chanda*) for the purchase of the victim. The Gond worship *Bhawani mata* on the porch or veranda of their houses. They sacrifice a red cock and a white pigeon to the goddess.

If the village has been free from any epidemic disease for a number of years, all the villagers get together and collect money for the purchase of a cock or a red he-goat. They bring the sacrificial animal to the village boundary. There a *gunia* (soothsayer) or the official village priest (*dewar*) offers *hum* (clarified butter and incense), breaks a coconut and sprinkles liquor on the offerings. Then they get the goat



to eat a few grains of *kodo* or pulse. As soon as the victim has picked up a few grains, it is chased over the boundary into the jungle. This is the offering of the villagers to the gods of disease, their reward for saving the village from disease.

In the neighbouring village where people are acquainted with the sacrifice of the goat, they sacrifice a chicken before the goat when it appears. Then they chase it over the boundary of their own village. No one would dare take the goat home and keep it. Only after the goat has wandered far enough and its whereabouts can no longer be traced, may one catch it, kill it and eat its meat without any harm. But if the goat returns to its original home, it is considered a sign that disease has also returned. The villagers again perform a sacrifice and drive the goat away a second time. But this time they chase it so far that there is no danger of its return. They usually take it to a distant village or cross the Narbada with it.

On Dasehra, Gond and Bhumia begin to dance the Sailsa, Rina, Karma and Birha dances. During the monsoon all dancing had stopped. Now it begins again. The young men and women take a bath, prepare their hair, dress in new clothes, the boys donning a new turban, the girls wearing a new *lagra*. They put flowers in their hair and deck themselves out with their best jewels. Early in the morning, after a meal of *kodai* and pulse, they proceed in groups to a neighbouring village. Boys and girls usually visit different villages. They first go to the village headman, and begin to drum, sing and dance the Sailsa before his house. The headman sends for his villagers who gather around the visitors and begin dancing with them. Sometimes it is the stick dance (*danda*), sometimes the Rina dance that is performed. The visitors are keen on dancing with the marriageable partners of the village. Matches are often planned on this occasion.

After some hours of dancing, the guests are liberally entertained by the village headman with a meal and liquor. Sometimes the leader of the group receives a present of a few rupees or even a bullock. The visitors return to their home village, singing and dancing, and heavy with liquor. After

a year their visit is returned by their former hosts, and it is now their turn to entertain the guests and to send them home with an equal or even better present.

The songs which are sung during the dance are not always of high poetical value. Usually a song consists of one verse only which is endlessly repeated with certain minor variations. Here are some examples of a Saila song:

*Tera jiyat mera raj re—dhani sagar tera jiyat mera raj re*  
Your life is my kingdom, an ocean of riches, your life is  
my kingdom

*More raja hoto to chutka leto (twice)*  
The man who is my husband buys toe-rings for me

*Chutka pahir ghare jaun re—dhani sagar tera jiyat mere raj (twice)*

Adorned with toe-rings I go home, an ocean of riches is  
your life for me, my kingdom

*More raja hoto to pairi leto (twice)*  
The man who is my husband buys ankle rings for me

*Pairi pahir ghare jaun re—dhani sagar tera jiyat mera raj (twice)*

Adorned with ankle-rings I go home, an ocean of riches is  
your life for me, my kingdom

*More raja hoto to torar leto (twice)*  
The man who is my husband buys a ring for me

*Torar pahir ghare jaun—dhani sagar tera jiyat mera raj (twice)*

Adorned with a ring I go home, an ocean of riches is your  
life for me, my kingdom

*More raja hoto to phundra leto (twice)*  
The man who is my husband buys a hair-string for me

*Phundra pahir ghare jaun—dhani sagar tera jiyat mera raj (twice)*

Adorned with a hair-string I go home, an ocean of riches  
is your life for me, my kingdom



*More raja hoto to bandi leto (twice)*

The man who is my husband buys me a jacket

*Bandi pahir ghare jaun re—dhani sagar tera jiyat mera raj  
(twice)*

Adorned with a jacket I go home, an ocean of riches is  
your life for me, my kingdom

Another song is this:

*Tare nane ko nanair nani—Mahadeo deo darobar lagota  
Mahadeo god holds court*

*Kon kon deotan ki seva? Mahadeo deo darobar lagota  
Who worships the gods? God Mahadeo holds court*

*Khero mata na sewa— " " " "  
Khero mata's worship?*

*Thakur deota na sewa— " " " "  
Thakur deo's worship?*

*Khila Muthuwa na sewa— " " " "  
Khila Muthuwa's worship?*

*Tare na ko nanair nani<sup>13</sup> " " " "*

*Chhitala mai na sewa " " " "  
Chhitala Mata's worship?*

*Hurr bhale hurraha chah hurraha cha<sup>14</sup>*

*Patel Baba na sewa— " " " "  
Patel Baba's worship?*

*Hardulalala sewa— " " " "  
Hardulal's worship?*

<sup>13</sup> The first verse is for intonation; it is just a series of meaningless syllables.

<sup>14</sup> These are the sounds by which cattle are driven on by the shepherds.

A third song will be sufficient to prove my contention:

*Tere nak ne har naina nani tair na ne har nani* (twice)

*More raja re bina raniya ka mahal ho gaye suna* (twice)

I heard that my king is without a queen in his palace

*Chal hathare—kahan to gaye hein raja re—More palang ke  
baithaiya*

Go on, now—Where has the king gone?—He is sitting on  
my bed

*Chaiha hurra, cheha hurra*

*Kahan to gaye hein raja re—More basti basaiya* (twice)

Where has he gone, the king? He is staying in my hamlet

*Raja ke bina raniya ka mahal ho gaye suna*

I heard that the king is without a queen in his palace

*Kahan to gaye hein raja re—More kachheri laraiya*

Where did he go, the king?—He is fighting in my court

*Raja re bina raniya ka mahal ho gaye suna*

I heard that the king is without a queen in his palace

*Kahan to gaye hein raja re—More khursi baithaiya*

Where did he go, the king?—He is sitting on my chair

*Raja re bina raniya ka mahal ho gaye suna.*

I heard that the king is without a queen in his palace.

## 12. DIWARI

Diwari, the feast of light, is really a Hindu feast, in honour of Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu and goddess of wealth; it falls on the new moon day of the month of *Karttik* (October). In Mandla District, Diwari is celebrated with especial solemnity by the Ahir (cattle-grazers) who on this day give their cattle, the source of their wealth, a special treat.

Gond and Bhumia take a more passive part in these celebrations. But a few days before the feast the owners of cattle make their womenfolk clean house and stable and give them a fresh coating with cattle dung.



On the day before the feast, the Ahir has to fast. Then he collects all the cattle in his care, takes hold of their tails and cuts the hairs at the end of their tails with a sickle. Only cattle, no buffaloes, are shorn in this manner. The hair which he gathers in his loincloth, the Ahir plaits into a rope, five to six cubits long and finger-thick. Then he milks all the cows, and as much milk as he can get, from ten to forty pints, he pours into a huge vessel half filled with rice. His wife boils the rice and prepares a dish which is called *khir*. When it is ready, the Ahir calls the village priest (*dewar*) and all the boys of the village. In their company he takes the rice boiled in milk to the god of the grazing ground, *Kher deo*, believed to be present in a stone slab lying flat on the ground under a tree. This god is commonly worshipped only by the Ahir and Bhumia, not by the Gond. The Ahir now sprinkles some rice on a slab, anoints it with clarified butter and liquor, offers *hum* before it, and breaks a coconut. After him the village priest repeats the same ceremony. Then the Ahir with the rice boiled by his wife in milk, feeds the boys of the village. But he himself and the village priest do not eat anything.

After the meal, the Ahir takes his long stick and with the rope plaited of the tail hair of his cattle he ties the twigs of *memri* (a bush) and *chula dheri* (*Butea frondosa*) leaves to the top of his stick. Then he goes with the village priest and all the boys to the house of the village headman. He pushes open the door of the house with his stick, then he also goes to the stable and opens its door with the stick. Swinging his stick he dances with the boys in the courtyard. The village headman gives him a rupee. Then the Ahir goes with his companions to all the other houses of the village, pushes open the doors of house and stable for which he receives a rupee, or at least a few annas, or grain. At each house the Ahir dances, swinging his stick. Then he goes home. Some village elders whom he has invited come and drink a glass of *mahua* liquor with him. After that he with his family eats rice boiled in milk. The village priest also takes his meal in the Ahir's house. After the meal the Ahir again goes into the village, accompanied by the village priest and the boys, pushes open

the doors to house and stable and dances swinging his stick. At each house the Ahir gets some money and about a *barria* full of grain (maize, *kodo* or rice). He is also served a cup of liquor. Thus he passes the whole night, either in eating, drinking or dancing.

Early next morning, when the cattle leave the stables for the grazing ground, the Ahir, with the help of the boys, decorates them, splashing them with yellow, red and blue dyes, trimming their horns with tassels and pasting them with yellow clay (*geru matti*). The Ahir also puts garlands of flowers around their necks. No one dreams of setting his bullocks to work on this day. Today and for the next two weeks the Ahir does not graze the cattle of the village; this is done by the boys of other castes who take turns in tending the cattle. The boys who on their fixed day take out the cattle for grazing must fast the whole day and may only eat jungle fruit. Some fruits they collect and bring home in the evening. They offer them to *Gothen deo*.

While the Ahir is busy with the cattle, Gond and Bhumia perform a sacrifice to *Bhawani mata* on the porch of their houses. They select a speckled cock as their victim, throw *kodai* before it and when the animal picks up a few grains, the head of the family cuts off its head with an axe (*pharsa*). This cock is, however, sacrificed every second or third year only, in other years the offering consists merely of a coconut. In some villages the sorcerer (*panda*) or another man offers milk to Lakshmi (who is also called *Gaumata*, 'cow-mother'), a coconut and clarified butter to *Dharti mata*, the earth-mother, and a coconut or even a goat to *Thakur deo* (if the *panda* is a Bhumia) or to *Bara deo* (if he is a Gond).

At noon, the grazers return with the cattle to the village. The owners of bullocks take a bath and then feed their cattle. They give them a meal of boiled rice (*bhat*) with *urda* pulse and pumpkin (*kalindar* or *bhura*). While the bullocks are fed, like human beings, out of brass plates or leaf platters, some members of the family eat with them from the same plates. The idea is that the cattle should be treated on this day like gods, or at least like human beings. Sometimes they are even served delicacies like cakes of *urda* flour baked in



oil (*bara*), cakes of wheat or rice flour baked in oil (*godala*), or pancakes of wheat flour (*sohari*), and of course they are given salt.

After this meal, the cattle of the whole village are brought to an open place near the village. A white heifer is caught and decorated, a spot on its forehead is painted red (*tika*), a coconut is broken and distributed among the people present. Then the grazing boys (called *mauvani*) run five times (according to other information seven times) around the heifer, each time passing under the heifer's belly. All the people shout and frighten the animals which scatter all over the place. In the evening they are again brought to the same place and the ceremony is repeated. Its meaning is not clear. At noon the owners of cattle form, from cattle dung, an arrow-like figure which they put up in their courtyards. They call it *Gothen deo* and worship it with an offering of coconuts, clarified butter and fruit. In the evening, the grazing boys perform an offering of jungle fruits before *Gothen deo*.

In some villages, the grazing of cattle is done on Diwari by four or five men who have bound themselves to do this for twelve consecutive years on Diwari. These men are called *mauniar*. They may belong to the Gond or Bhumia tribe, or to any of the non-tribal castes of the district. During the day they must fast. Instead of a stick, they use a flute when they drive the cattle to the grazing ground. They dress like men, but wear the ornaments of women; silver necklaces (*hawel* and *guriya*), for instance, and pearl strings around neck and wrists. The whole day they remain in the jungle grazing the cattle, and may not return to the village before dusk. After their return the above-mentioned ceremony of crawling under the belly of a heifer is performed by these men. Then they distribute, among the people present, red ber fruits (*Zyziphus jujuba*), collected during the day in the jungle, and pieces of coconut. Then they hang up their flutes in the house, take off their ornaments, wash their hands and take their first meal of the day.

It is believed that a man who has done this grazing on Diwari for twelve plus one year—thirteen years in all—will be reborn as a cow, if after his death all the ceremonies and

the funeral feast are properly performed. My informants believed that it would be an enjoyable fate to be reborn as a cow, since cows have a 'lazy' life. They are rarely yoked to the plough, need not do much work and are worshipped.

All the people prepare a good meal in the evening of Diwari, and the head of the family is supposed to give some money to his sons and daughters. They catch a cow and hold it till they receive the present from the father.

At night, the Ahir dance the *sela* (stick dance) and drive the cattle round. The other villagers do not join this rather wild dance of the Ahir; they merely look on. But all who can afford it have a glass of liquor. Any feast day, one of their own or of another caste, is an excuse for the aboriginals of eastern Mandla, to have a drink. It goes without saying that after a drink they get jolly and themselves start a song or a dance.

Gond and Bhumia of eastern Mandla so far do not imitate the habit of the Hindus of worshipping silver coins and gambling, though they too have begun to realise that Mammon is a powerful god in this world and is worshipped by most people. Not all imagine this god in the lovely form of Lakshmi, as the Hindus do.

A Gond or Bhumia who is in the proud possession of a water-buffalo may on this day sacrifice a sow (*pathiya*) in the cowshed. This sacrifice is called *suaria channa*. The pig is killed by smashing its head on the skull of a buffalo. The owners believe that after such an offering their buffalo cows will give birth to many calves. If the owner of a buffalo cannot afford the sacrifice of a full-grown pig, he offers at least a pigling. If a sow is not available, a boar is sacrificed.

The Ahir shepherds spend the days following Diwari in dancing and drinking liquor. They go from house to house, from village to village, dancing and singing, and collect money and grain from the owners of the cattle which they have been tending throughout the year. They deserve such a break in the routine of their lives.



## CHAPTER XXIV

# VARIOUS FESTIVALS

### 1. HARVEST RITES

WHEN Gond and Bhumia are about to begin with the sowing, they fill the seed grain into the bowl, then reverently touch the plough (*nagar*) with it; after that their forehead and the mouths of their bullocks. Only then do they begin the sowing.

When the *kodo* is cut and spread in the barn (*kanihar*), it is threshed out by making the bullocks walk over it. The straw is then removed with two sticks, leaving only the grain on the threshing floor. Then the village priest (*dewar*) is called. He is given a pigling which he sacrifices as soon as it eats the rice grain offered to it. The village priest cuts off its head with an axe (*pharsa*) and gathers the blood in a brass plate (*thali*). This blood he sprinkles on the grain. Then he offers five chickens, a coconut and liquor. After that a meal is prepared and the sacrificial meat is served with rice and pulse. The owner of the grain and his family partake of the meal. The village priest also gets his share.

Later, the grain is winnowed and placed in a heap on the threshing floor. Then a lamp (*diya*) is lighted in front of the grain. Two winnowing fans are put up as wind-screens, to prevent the breeze from blowing out the light. Near the light they place a brass pot (*lota*) full of oil. The light has to burn all through the night. When the oil is burned up, they fill the lamp again from the brass vessel. They do not know the significance of this rite and perform it because it is the custom.

The next day the grain is filled into bags and carried home on the back of their bullocks. The new grain is filled into the bins (*kothi*), and then a burning light is placed on the bin.

## 2. WEDDING RITES FOR NATURAL OBJECTS

The custom of performing wedding rites for a new well before water may be drawn from it, or for a young mango tree (*Mangifera indica*) before its first fruits may be eaten, was not so long ago quite popular among the non-tribal castes of Central India. Nowadays, this custom has almost disappeared among the Hindus of eastern Mandla. But the Gond of this area still perform it very faithfully. In the villages around Dindori and along the Narbada River where many Brahmins have settled, a member of this priestly caste is invited to perform the ceremony. In the villages that are more in the interior of eastern Mandla the tribesmen themselves conduct the rite. The Bhumia, however, rarely perform it.

(a) *Wedding Ceremony of a Well*

When a Gond has decided to dig a well, he summons a Brahmin to find the right spot where an abundant supply of water may be assured. On the spot selected for the well the Brahmin lights a sacrificial light in a brass lamp. Then he recites some prayers and invokes *Indra*, *Barun* (*Varuna*?) and other gods. At intervals he shouts the word *soham* which in Sanskrit means 'I am' and expresses the cardinal principle of the Vedanta philosophy that God and soul are one and the same thing. Whenever the Pandit (teacher), as he is also called by the Gond, says *soham*, the well-digger throws small pieces of coconut and of a confection prepared of sugar (*chironji*) into the light. This offering is made to pacify the gods who may be angry for the violence done to Mother Earth. For, do the well-diggers not break through her skin when they dig the well? The offering is also made in order to implore the protection of the gods for the well-diggers so that no accident may befall them and also to ensure a plentiful supply of water. The rest of the sweetmeat is distributed among the people attending the ceremony. After this the owner himself digs up some earth; then the well-diggers start their work, in earnest. The owner of the well has to begin the digging so that any curse, which the earth-mother may utter for having wounded her, may not fall on the workmen but on the person who ordered them to do the work. The



Brahmin is presented with some gift worth about a rupee.

When the work is completed and the well ready for use, the owner nevertheless may not drink its water until the wedding of the well has been performed. The Gond state that the well is married to its owner. Others, however, are permitted occasionally to fetch water from a new well before its wedding is performed; the owner of the well may in no case use it, nor may any member of his family. For the owner, the well is a bride whom he may not touch before the wedding is performed. An added reason for the performance of this ceremony is to advertise the owner's achievement and to display his wealth.

On the day fixed for the wedding of the well, its owner invites a Brahmin to solemnise the marriage. On the eve of the feast the villagers begin singing the 'Ramdhun song', as it is called, a hymn in praise of Rama. It tells the story of his return from exile undergone in fulfilment of a vow taken by his father, King Dhasaratha, in favour of one of his wives, Kaikai.

When the Brahmin arrives, he receives a respectful welcome from the villagers and is conducted to the well in a procession. On the way they sing the Ramdhun to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. The male members of the celebrating family must fast from morning until the conclusion of the ceremony. On arrival at the well, the Brahmin asks some persons to dig a pit about two feet square and two feet deep. When the pit is ready, the Brahmin fills it with chips of various kinds of wood; of the mango tree (*amar*, *Mangifera indica*), the *chula* (*Butea frondosa*) and the wood-apple tree (*Ferronia elephantum*). Near the pit a pole is erected, topped by an iron trident (*tarsul*). At the side of the larger pole is a shorter flagstaff with a white cloth-banner.

Now the Brahmin himself draws water from the well and pours it into four new earthen pots which he places at the four corners of the well, each within a small square outlined with wheat-flour (*chauk*). Then with cow-dung he fashions four crude figures of the goddess Parvati, and places one at the side of each earthen pot. On the top of each pot he puts

a lamp made of wheat flour, fills the lamps with oil or clarified butter (*ghee*) and lights a cotton wick inserted in the lamps. He hangs a banner of cotton cloth near each pot and puts five annas into the pots.

The owner of the well with his whole family is now made to sit on a sheet spread out near the seat of the Brahmin. The latter places on a plate made of green leaves (*pathal*) seven areca nuts, seven copper coins (*paisa*), seven sticks of turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) and seven piles of husked rice. Then he sprinkles the owner of the well and his family with milk and water, and anoints them with turmeric. He also sprinkles milk and water on the oblation which is on the leaf plate and tosses a few leaves of the wood-apple tree and a few flower buds on it. Finally, he draws a few marks on the four earthen pots, and offers clarified butter and coarse cane sugar (*gur* or *jaggery*) to the figures of Parvati.

While these rites are being performed, the Brahmin recites invocations (*mantra*) from his book. The invocations may be read from any of the sacred books of Hinduism, according to the pleasure of the Brahmin. As the Brahmins of the district generally know little Sanskrit, they often do not even understand what they are reciting. After the recitation, the officiating Brahmin asks some of the men present to take a long thread, soak it in turmeric water and tie it around the neck of one earthen pot, then, without breaking it, to wind it also around the other pots so that a square is formed. Then the Brahmin asks another man to watch the lamps on the top of the pots and to feed them with oil. While the thread is being tied to the fourth and last pot, the Brahmin asks the owner of the well for some presents. He demands a cow, gold, silver, a small brass vessel (*lota*) and a brass plate (*thali*). The owner may accede to his wishes according to his means; usually it is a present worth about five rupees.

Only after the Brahmin has received his fee, does he proceed with the sacrifice. He sets fire to the wood in the square pit, and begins to recite the prayers of the sacrifice. During the recitation of the prayers, the Brahmin shouts the word *soham* from time to time. A quantity of millet (*Andropogon sorghum*), unhusked rice and sesame seed



(*Sesamum indicum*, til), about twenty pounds in all, is mixed with clarified butter and raw sugar (*gur*). Now everybody present takes part in throwing this mixture, a little at a time, into the fire. This rite lasts about half an hour. When the entire sacrifice has been consumed by the flames, the Brahmin rings a bell, and blows a long-drawn note on the conch (used by the Hindus as a horn at religious ceremonies). Thus ends the sacrifice.

The Brahmin then draws water from the well, and gives the owner and his family a draught. After that he offers water to the others who might wish to have a drink. Another thread is then soaked in turmeric water, folded six or seven times and cut into pieces. These pieces are then tied around the right wrists of all the men present. The owner of the well takes three of the earthen pitchers home, the fourth pot he leaves at the well. Some of the men present take the money that had been put into the pot.

The Brahmin then takes his leave, while the others return to the house of the celebrating family. There they are regaled with a banquet which may cost the host from fifty to a hundred rupees.

In the villages where no Brahmin is called to perform this ceremony, the tribesmen leave out his part, but perform the wedding ceremony in spite of his absence. The owner of the well carves in wood the crude figure of a man, about a cubit high, and dresses it up in bridal garments, consisting of a loincloth, shirt, coat and turban. The villagers then take the figure in a procession to the well where they anoint it with turmeric paste. After this ceremony the owner of the well gives his friends and relatives a banquet.

#### (b) *Wedding Ceremony for a Mango Tree*

When a mango tree (*amar*) yields its first fruit, the Gond perform a ceremonial wedding for it, somewhat similar to the wedding of the well. The Gond regard the tree as the child of its owner, since he or his parents planted it. As a father, the owner is supposed to arrange the wedding of his children when they reach maturity. The mango tree is like the owner's daughter and it is considered improper that the tree

should give its fruit before its marriage is celebrated. The tree's wedding, therefore, must be performed before its owner tastes its fruit.

Generally a Brahmin is invited to perform the ceremony. Some skilled man carves from the wood of the *Salhen* (*Shorea robusta*), *Sarai* (*Boswellia serrata*) or *Umar* tree (*Ficus religiosa*) a human figure, paints it with vermilion (*sendhur*) and places it at the base of the mango tree. The figure is called *mangrohen*, this being the name of the wedding post of the Gond. Now a long pole is erected near the figure of *Salhen*, *Sarai* or *Umar* wood, and a white cloth banner is attached to the top of the pole. Bridesmaids (*suasa* and *suasin*) are appointed and they tie a threefold thread around the tree. Then they apply turmeric paste to tree and thread.

When the Brahmin arrives, he is received with deep respect. His feet are washed; he then sits on a piece of sack-cloth (*gunnia*) or blanket spread in the shade of the mango tree. *Pan* (*Piper betle*, i.e. betel leaf) is served to the Brahmin with areca nut and tobacco. After him the others also are served. Meanwhile some of the villagers prepare a pile of wood of *Pipar* (*Ficus religiosa*), *Chula* (*Butea frondosa*) and *Amar* (mango tree) for the sacrificial fire. All other requisites for the offering are likewise fetched and placed close at hand for the Brahmin. These sacrificial ingredients include a banana leaf (*khera ki pata*), leaves of *bel* (*Aegle marmelos*), *dubh* grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), cow's milk, coarse sugar, turmeric, *bagri* rice (half-husked rice), clarified butter and water from a spring. The banana leaf is spread on the ground and all the ingredients for the offering, along with coconuts, areca nuts (*supari*), some pulse (*dar*) and flower buds are laid out on it. There is also a pot full of *kodo* grain, and the so-called *kalsa*, which plays an important part in every wedding ritual.

The owner of the tree now takes his seat near the Brahmin who begins to recite passages from the *Ramayana*. At intervals during the recitation he tells the owner of the well to take reeds of the *dubh* grass, *bel* and *mango* leaves in a bunch, dip them into the spring water and sprinkle the water on the wooden figure, leaning against the trunk of the



young mango tree. In the same manner, the figure is then sprinkled with milk. After that the bunch of leaves and *dubh* grass is itself placed on the figure, with some flowers, turmeric, *bagri* rice and pulse. For about an hour, the Brahmin continues to read and to explain the passages read to the people. At the end of the recitation, the Brahmin sets fire to the pile of wood.

While the fire is burning, he mixes about two pounds of *bagri* rice with clarified butter and coarse sugar. All the relatives of the host sitting around the fire take bits from the mixture and during the recitations of the Brahmin throw them into the fire. It takes almost an hour for the whole offering to be consumed by the flames. When the sacrifice is completed, the Brahmin asks the host for his fee. He usually demands a cow, a loincloth, an umbrella, foodstuff and other things. Of course not all his wishes can be fulfilled. The host pays him from five to ten rupees. A poor man may pay him a rupee and four annas only.

When the Brahmin has secured his due, he prepares *prashad* (sacrificial food). He bakes wheat flour in clarified butter and refined or coarse sugar. The *prashad* is distributed by the Brahmin among all the men attending the ceremony, beginning with the host. Finally, he bestows his blessing on the owner of the tree with the words: 'Go home and be happy.'

When the Brahmin has finished his ritual, the village blacksmith (*Agaria*) comes forward and, rolling a hollow bamboo tube with holes in it and filled with white flour, yellow turmeric powder and orange coloured gram flour around the tree, weaves a pretty pattern on the ground, resembling a carpet.

Then the bridesmaids (*suasa* and *suasin*) dip their thumbs into turmeric paste and apply the paste on the wooden figure at the mango tree, on the forehead of the tree's owner, and on the tree itself. Just as in the wedding ritual, the guests then approach and perform the same ceremony one after the other. All embrace and kiss the owner of the tree and the mango tree as well.

The feast is concluded with a banquet for all the guests. This may cost the host about fifty rupees.

## 3. Dol

In the month of *Baisakh*, i.e. in April or May, those Gond who can afford it, may perform a special feast in honour of the god Vishnu. A wealthy man may repeat this feast every second or third year. They call it *Bhagvat*<sup>1</sup> or *Dol*<sup>2</sup>. It is celebrated to show one's piety and liberality and to get the blessing of a child, an increase in wealth or a cure from disease. Sometimes the feast is celebrated in fulfilment of a vow made in sickness or in other difficulties. While this feast is quite common among the more Hinduised Gond, it is not popular among the Bhumia.

The main actors in the performance of the ceremonies during the feast are two Brahmins and a member of the Yogi caste.<sup>3</sup> The whole feast lasts for nine days.

After all the necessary preparations have been made, the two Brahmins and the Yogi are informed of the exact date when the feast is going to begin. Friends and relatives from other villages are also invited to attend the ceremony. On the day fixed for the beginning of the feast the host, accompanied by his fellow villagers, goes some distance from his house to welcome the arriving priests. They take along flower garlands (*mala*), a brass vessel (*lota*) full of water, and a lamp in a small earthen pot (*kalsa*). The lamp (*diya*) is a small earthen saucer filled with oil or clarified butter (*ghee*) with a burning cotton wick in it. When the host's party meets the arriving Brahmins and the Yogi, they salute and garland them. Then the guests are led to the house where the feast is celebrated. On the way they sing the following song:

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagvat* means God, but also Shiva, Vishnu, *Suriya* (Sun-god). It may be applied as well to Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu. Cf. Ramchandra Pathak: Vol. II, p. 822.

<sup>2</sup> *Dol* is a temple or house *en miniature* made of papier-mâché; in it is the picture or figure of 'Bhagwan', i.e. Vishnu.

<sup>3</sup> Yogi or Jogi, the well-known order of religious mendicants and devotees of Shiva. A large portion of the Jogi have now developed into a caste, and these latter marry and have families. But they still function at certain religious ceremonies, as for instance at this. Cf. R. V. Russell and Hiralal (1916): Vol. III. pp. 243-54.



*Koilia to boli karaing ho*  
*Amar ke dal baithavai koilia to.*  
 The Koel bird calls,  
 Perching on the branch of the mango tree.

*Janakpur bara neki lagai ho*  
*Jaha chali Sita byahai chali Janakpur.*  
 Janakpur is a very happy place,  
 Where Sita went for her wedding.  
*Gagria par ghaila ghumi ho,*  
*Lanka men ghuma Hanuman, gagria ho.*  
 As the earthen pot dances on the other pot  
 Thus *Hanuman* dances at Lanka.

My Gond informants were unable to explain the meaning of this song. But obviously it is an expression of joy over the visit of the priests. In Indian poetry the Koel (*Eudynamis honorata*) is the symbol of exquisite sound; 'the voice of your beloved, the performance of a musical artiste, and all best worth hearing in life are posted under this heading.'

The second verse of the song apparently suggests that the village honoured by the visit of the Brahmins is as happy to welcome them as Janakpur was, when Sita, the bride of Rama, went there to get married.

The third verse equally expresses the delight of the villagers; they feel inclined to dance as *Hanuman*, the monkey-god and helpmate of Rama, danced at Lanka, when he found Sita at the capital of her kidnapper Ravan. The first part of verse three alludes to a woman carrying two vessels full of water from the well. She has to poise them on her head in perfect balance or they would fall off. Of such perfection was *Hanuman's* dance.

When the party arrives at the house of the celebrating family, the host washes the feet of the Brahmins and of the Yogi at the gate leading into the courtyard and invites them to sit down on a sheet spread on the ground. After a while they are asked to enter the courtyard. Again the host washes the feet of the Brahmins, pouring water over their feet from

\* J. L. Kipling (1892): p. 46.

a brass vessel (*lota*). The water is caught up in a brass plate (*thali*). Meanwhile, relatives of the host distribute betel nut (*pan-supari*), country cigars (*biri*) and tobacco to the assembled guests. Then a large cushion, filled with the husk of *kodo* is laid on the ground, a carpet or sheet spread over it and another cushion placed on it. With flour a swastika is drawn on the cushion and at each corner a small earthen pot is placed. The chief Brahmin is then invited to recline on the cushion.

Now the man who acts as master of ceremonies during the feast takes another earthen pot, fills it with water, throws a silver coin into it, as also into the pots placed at each corner of the Brahmin's seat. Then a burning lamp is placed on the pot in front of the chief priest. Around this pot the master of ceremonies now rather perfunctorily digs up the ground, mixes it with cattle manure and sows barley (*jau*, *Hordeum vulgare*) and wheat in it, saying: '*Bhagwan ki jai*, ('*Bhagwan* be praised'). At length he sets up a long pole (*komba*), between twenty to thirty feet high, again sows some barley in front of it and places a coconut there, a piece of cloth and an iron trident (*tarsul*). At its top the pole is adorned with a trident (*tarsul*) and a flag. At one place an incision is made into the pole and a small mirror (*aina*) set into the cut. The trident is painted with red lead (*sendhur*). This pole is erected in honour of *Hanuman*, the faithful companion and helper of Rama on his expedition to Lanka. *Hanuman* is at the same time the village god in Central India. To have this pole in his courtyard is a distinction which every Hinduised Gond covets. It is a proof that he has performed the *dol*.

After all these preparations, the host approaches the Brahmin sitting on the cushion and presents him with a loin-cloth (*dhoti*), a shirt, a pair of shoes, a cap, an umbrella, two calves, and a gold-piece. He garlands him. The Brahmin now dresses. Then he sits down again. He asks an attendant to fetch his *Ramayana*, the book which relates the story of Rama, a small bell and a conch shell. Around the place where the sacrifice will take place the relatives of the host place earthen saucers with burning lights in them. The host and his family take their seats near the cushion on which



the Brahmin reclines. The other guests and villagers crowd around them.

The Brahmin then begins with his recitation of the *Ramayana*. At times he stops and explains a difficult verse. This recital which is done in the traditional rhythmic chanting tune is carried on from morning till night for four or eight days,<sup>5</sup> with a break only of two to three hours at noon when the Brahmin takes his meal with his companions. Every morning and evening, the Brahmin begins and closes his recitation with an offering; he pours clarified butter and the gum of the *Sarai* tree (*Boswellia serrata*) into a small fire and breaks a coconut. Then he blows his conch and rings his bell. After that he lights three cotton wicks, each soaking in a small earthen saucer filled with clarified butter, and places them on the spot where the offering was performed. After this ceremony the villagers are dismissed. The Brahmin and his attendants are served a good meal, consisting of *sohari* (wheat cakes) and *puri* (cakes baked in butter), and prepared by a man from whom a Brahmin may accept food. The villagers return after the Brahmin and his companions finish their meal, and the singing goes on till midnight.

One of the songs recited on this occasion is called *Ramdhun*. It is known all over northern and central India among the Hindus. Everywhere it is sung in the same tune, but the words vary. In Mandla District they sing the following version:

*Raghupati Raghau Raja Ram—Patit pavan Sita Ram*  
King Rama, Raghu's son and of his clan—Sita and Rama,  
you sanctify the sinner.

*Jai Raghu nandan jai Ghanshyam—Patit pavan Sita Ram*  
Praise to the son of Raghu, dark as the rain-cloud—Sita and  
Rama, you sanctify the sinner.

*Yadupati Yadau lila dham—Bhakt ubaran hei Ghanshyam*

<sup>5</sup> The conviction that the recital of sacred texts carries merit or produces magic power is very old in Hinduism and found even among the Vedic Indians. Cf. H. Lueders (1951): pp. 15 ff.

Son of Yadu, and of his clan, abode of the play of appearances,—You redeem your devotees, dark like the raincloud.

*Dashrath nandan jai jai Ram—Jai jai mangal Sita Ram*  
Praise to Rama, Dashrath's son—Praise to Sita and Rama who make happy.

*Bolo jai jai Sita Ram—Gao sab mili Radheshyam*  
Give praise to Sita and Rama—sing, all of you, to the dark lover of Radha.

*Jab bolo tab Sita Ram—Khali jihva kaune kam*  
If you speak at all, call the names of Sita and Rama—Idle is the tongue in doing other work.

*Hari ka nam bhajo sukh dham—Jan man ranjan Sita Ram.*  
Sing Hari's name, the abode of joy—Of Sita and Rama who make people glad.

This song contains many allusions to Hindu mythology with which only Hinduised Gond may be familiar. The song of Ramdhun as such is clearly of Hindu origin. That it came from northern India can be seen from the expression *sab mili* (all of you). In ordinary Hindi 'all of you' would be: *sab milkar*; the expression *sab mili* is a form of the Brijia dialect, the language of Brijia Mandal, i.e. of Mathura Brindavan. Before the development of Hindi prose (*khadi boli*), all composition in verse form used to be done in the Brijia dialect. The song is clearly a hymn to Rama and his wife Sita. Rama is the grandson of Raghu, the son of Dilip, of the Surya (sun) clan. Another god and incarnation of Vishnu praised in the song, is Krishna, of the clan of Yadu. Yadu, the son of Yayati and Devayani, was the founder of a new clan. Radha is the milkmaid (*gopi*) whom Krishna loved best. Hari is the name of Vishnu, but also of Rama.

They also sing other songs in praise of the gods Rama and Krishna, like the following:

*Hare Ram hare Ram—Ram Ram hare hare*  
O Rama, O Rama—Rama, Rama, oh, oh



*Hare Krishna hare Krishna—Krishn Krishn hare hare.*  
*O Krishna, O Krishna—Krishna, Krishna, oh, oh.*

Or they sing in endless repetitions:

*Jai jai Ram Sita Ram, jai Ram.*

Praise to Rama, praise to Sita and Rama, praise to Rama.

On the ninth day of the recital a pit of about two feet in length, breadth and depth is dug in the host's courtyard. The chief Brahmin takes his seat near the pit. His book is handed to him with the ingredients for an offering. For a while the Brahmin recites a passage from the *Ramayana* and then explains the meaning of the verses he has read. Then he himself fills the pit with fuel, wood of the *Bhula* tree (*Terminalia belerica?*), of the *Bel* tree (*Aegle marmelos*) and of sandal wood. He then lights the fire. While his Brahmin assistant tends the fire, the chief Brahmin draws with wheat flour lines in the form of a square at each side of the pit. Then he moulds a low platform out of cattle manure and places on it the ingredients for the offering: two sticks of turmeric, a pot with clarified butter, some coarse cane sugar, a pot with milk, some reeds of the sacred *dubh* grass, rice grains, pulse, seven betel nuts, a coconut, a piece of white cotton thread, flowers and leaves of the mango tree and of the *bel* tree.

This done, the Brahmin begins the ceremony by sprinkling water with the *dubh* grass on the fire in the pit. Then he chants some incantations (*mantra*) while his attendants throw little by little all the sacrificial gifts into the fire. After that the Brahmin mixes on a large brass plate about twelve seers (a seer is nearly two pounds in weight) of barley, twelve seers of rice, two seers of clarified butter and a seer of coarse sugar. Reciting texts from the *Ramayana* all the while, he throws with joined hands some of the mixture into the fire. Then he continues his recitation. At the end of each stanza he says: '*Soham, soham.*' This means: 'I am' and expresses the conviction that the soul of the individual is identical with *Brahma*, God. It is a basic principle of Vedantic philosophy. As soon as the chief Brahmin utters these words, all the persons attending the offering take some of the mixture and

with folded hands throw it into the fire. The whole performance lasts about an hour. After this the chief Brahmin asks the people around the pit to fold their hands and to pray in their hearts for an increase of their offspring, cattle, wealth, and for their health.

After this solemn offering, the host together with his entire family offers the Brahmin a cow, a carpet or sheet, and about fifteen rupees in cash. A rich man gives a bullock, horse or buffalo, and from sixty to hundred rupees in cash. The Brahmin graciously accepts the donation, again recites a few verses from the *Ramayana*, blows his conch shell, rings the bell, and lights a wax candle while all keep shouting, 'Sri Krishen ki jai! Ek Shankar ki jai!' ('Lord Krishna be praised! God Shankar be praised!'). With that the whole feast comes to an end.

With a candle in hand, the Brahmin now goes round and asks each person attending the function for a donation according to his means. He thus collects some more presents in cash and kind. After that all the people go to the Yogi, bow down and touch his feet with folded hands. The Yogi blesses them by putting his hand on their shoulder. The host presents the Yogi with a sum of fifty rupees. These the Yogi has to share with the two Brahmins. Then the host again approaches the chief Brahmin and touches his feet with folded hands. After him all the others make their obeisance. The Brahmin blesses them all saying: 'May your wealth increase.'

Now a man brings a calf, another one a pot with diluted milk. A third man snatches the tail of the calf and pours the milk on the tail. This he does repeatedly for about a minute. The calf is said to represent Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Then they mark the forehead of the calf with turmeric and at last touch its feet with folded hands. This calf is then presented to the chief Brahmin. Now the host pays another twenty-five rupees to the Yogi, and in addition gives him a loincloth, five yards long; to each of the Brahmins he gives five seers of rice and four annas, and then again to the chief Brahmin sixty seers of grain and three rupees.

After that a woman puts a burning lamp on the mouth of a *lota*, takes the *lota* on her head and a procession is formed.



All the people pull out a few stalks of the barley and wheat seedlings which have sprouted since the first day of the feast. Then some take the papier-mâché house of the god, the *dol*, on their shoulders and all the time shouting: '*Bhagwan ki jai! Krishna Bhagwan ki jai! Gau mata ki jai!*' ('God be praised! *Bhagwan* Krishna be praised! The Cow Mother be praised!') they proceed to the nearest river. They also sing the *Ramdhun* on the way to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. The women sing their own songs which are called *Bhamulia*.

At the river the Brahmin breaks a coconut and distributes the fragments to all present. Then he bathes all the figures of gods and goddesses which the people brought along from their houses. At last he himself takes a bath. In the end the people throw the *dol* into the water, then the stalks of barley and wheat, jump themselves into the water, splash about and pour water and dirt on each other.

The Brahmin who, of course, keeps aloof and does not take part in the general revelry meanwhile boils wheat flour in milk, adding clarified butter and sugar. After the bath he distributes a little to all who attended the feast. This is called *prashad*. After this all return home, singing and drumming vigorously.

In the evening of the same day the host feeds all the villagers and guests who have come from afar. As the number of diners is usually high, the expenses of such a dinner are naturally considerable, running to at least two hundred rupees.

When the Brahmin takes his leave, he is given a solemn send-off. The villagers accompany him some distance beyond the village, singing the *Ramdhun* and *Bhamulia* to the accompaniment of drums. One person carries a light on a *lota* at the head of the procession. At the final leave-taking the Brahmin again blesses all and says: 'Now go home and rest.'

After their return the host and his family cover the pit, in which the sacrifice took place, with earth and erect over it a platform in order to prevent any one from stepping over the sacred spot and desecrating it. On the platform they place five mounds of clay. On one clay mound they place a stone slab representing *Shankar* (Shiva). From now on the

head of the family should every day take a bath and sprinkle water on the stone, as also on the *tulsi* plant (sweet basil, *Ocimum sanctum*) which is planted in front of the long pole set up at the beginning of the feast.

This rite, with certain minor variations, is performed not only by the Gond, but also by many non-tribal castes in different parts of northern India. The Gond simply adopted this rite from them.



## CHAPTER XXV

# THE MAGIC WORLD

### 1. OMENS AND SUPERSTITIONS

#### (a) Omens

LIKE THE other tribes and non-tribals of the district, the Gond and Bhumia are also firm believers in omens. They follow the Hindu belief in assigning either bad or good luck to certain days of the week. This belief, however, does not seem to be very strong, for it scarcely ever prevents them from carrying out any design they have in mind, whether they consider the day auspicious for it or not. In important decisions, however, they do pay attention to inauspicious omens and delay the execution of a plan they have in mind for a more auspicious time.

They, for instance, turn back from their errand and return home when early in the morning they hear the call of a bird called *kidurri*. They fear that a tiger or another wild animal would attack them on a journey, or that some accident would befall them on the road. When they are on a journey or on another important errand, and a jackal or snake crosses their path, they might turn back and go home, for this is a sign that they would have bad luck.

Sneezing is generally considered an inauspicious omen.<sup>1</sup> Once one of my informants saw a woman turning back and cursing a man because he had sneezed while she passed him on her way to the well with a waterpot on her head. She believed that she would have come to grief had she continued on her way after his sneezing.

Some time ago a caste meeting took place at Banjari. It was decided that a certain Dhanua should pay ten rupees to a Bhumia, Budhu Baiga by name. Dhanua agreed to pay the money; but at the moment when he was handing over the

<sup>1</sup> This is so all over India. Cf. J. J. Modi (1911): Vol. 1, p. 25.

money to Budhu, a member of the *panch* sneezed. 'Chik hua', said the head of the caste council (*sirpanch*). And both opponents agreed on taking the sneeze as an omen indicating that the affair had not been settled in the proper way. Dhanua protested at once against the amount demanded from him, and Budhu clamoured for more. A prolonged and heated dispute arose, which at last resulted in the decision of the *panch* that Dhanua should pay Budhu fifteen rupees instead of ten. That untimely sneeze cost Dhanua five rupees.

When the eye throbs, they think that something is going to happen.

When they ask somebody to deliver a message to a person, they believe that at the moment when the message is delivered their toes will itch.

#### (b) Superstitions

After the *bidri* ceremony has been performed, no Bhumia or Gond woman, and no non-tribal woman either, will remove *chuhi matti* (clay for painting the house walls and floor) from the pit (*khadan*). People think that the village would suffer some misfortune or that the monsoon would fail if anyone removed the white clay from the pit at such a time. If people see someone digging for the white clay out of season, they scold her and say: 'Tumlog itne din soye? Tumhare ankh phut gaye the? Aur ajkal chuhi lejte hain?—tumko akhal nahin?' ('Did you sleep all these days? Or did you have sore eyes? Digging for white clay today? Have you no sense?'). Or they curse the woman and say: 'May a tiger kill you.' Or: 'Tumhi mata pare' ('May you get small-pox'). Or again: 'Aur rakh urawe' ('May your ashes be blown up [by the wind], i.e. may you die'). Or: 'Chuhi lenewalon ki dai aisi saisi' ('The mother of the women who now dig for white clay must have been a hussy').

When the maize begins to grow in the garden, Bhumia and Gond refrain from hanging their laundry on the garden fence (*berha*) for drying, lest the maize ripen prematurely. After the maize harvest, laundry may freely be hung on the garden fence.

In September and October, Gond and Bhumia may not



sweep their courtyards with brooms made of *chirra* reeds, but with those made of rags (*chhindi*). If brooms of *chirra* reeds (*bahri*) were used, the rain would stop prematurely. Inside the house, however, such brooms may be used, as also on the threshing floor.

Before Diwari, Bhumia and Gond do not allow any person wearing a flower in the turban or hair on the porch and veranda of their houses. People believe that the gods would be displeased if a person wearing flowers stepped on the veranda. Even children are prohibited from entering the veranda if they hold a flower in their hands. Should it happen nevertheless, people hurl abusive words (*gali*) at them when they are leaving.

Once when a man was allowed to step into the porch with flowers in his turban, the women of the house said that they had a nightmare on the following night. They dreamed that the man wearing the flower tried to force the door and to enter the house. They felt very uneasy about it.

People expect ill luck if a bird drops its dirt on them.

The Gond believe that a woman would get barren and never bear any children, if she ate the seeds of the Aonla fruit (*Phyllanthus emblica*).

Gond and Baiga women may not step over the rope or chain to which a horse is tied. They either walk around it or lift the rope or chain and pass under it. They believe that a woman who wants a child will not get pregnant for a whole year, while a woman who does not want a child will get pregnant within a year if she steps over a chain or rope tied around the neck of a horse. My informant once saw a horse tethered to a post near a footpath. A girl with a waterpot on her head refused to step over the chain lying in her path. She was afraid that a child would die in the house if she did so.

A Bhumia refused to cut and remove a withering plant of beans (*semi*) in his garden. He said that he was afraid his wife would not get any children if he did so.

'The Evil Eye'. Bhumia and Gond, like most Hindus in Central India, believe that the crops will fail if a person casts

'the evil eye' on a field. A Bhumia, asked how he knew that the damage in the field had been caused by 'the evil eye' and not by some natural means, replied that the absence of any natural cause for the failure of the crop was sufficient reason to suspect that it was due to 'the evil eye', the more so if the adjoining field with the same kind of soil produced a good crop.

A child on which 'the evil eye' has been cast withers away (*sukh jata*).

Bhumia and Gond have no indication by which they could recognise persons possessing 'the evil eye'. My informant Musra of Bijora believed that the evil wish and the mere intention of harming some one, with a prayer to that effect to a *deo* or *bhut*, was sufficient to produce the desired evil effect.

A person supposed to have 'the evil eye' can be cured of it in the following manner: At Duhania a young woman was suspected of having 'the evil eye'. Her relatives summoned a soothsayer from a nearby village (Patwari) to find out the truth of the matter. The soothsayer discovered by divination that the woman could be cured of her dangerous power if she sacrificed a white chicken. The woman soon returned with a very small white chicken and about a pound of *kutki* grain. The soothsayer poured the grain in front of the woman who was squatting before him and also poured a few grains on her head. Then he took the chicken and made it pick the grains from the head of the woman. The evil spirit possessing the woman was believed to be passing through the grain into the chicken. It was chased out of the village and released in the jungle. The woman was cured.

If the chicken had not picked the grains from the woman's head, it would have been a proof that the evil spirit was unwilling to leave the woman. And in revenge for this molestation he would have made the woman's belly swell. In fact, the woman on whom the cure had been effected suffered a few years later of stomach trouble and finally died due to her complaint.

*Superstitious Beliefs about Names.* Bhumia and Gond are in certain circumstances afraid of using a person's proper



name. This fear is even extended to the name of certain animals, or inanimate objects. It is believed that calling a person, animal or object by its proper name will harm him in a certain manner.

When they hear a tiger or panther roaring in the jungle, they refrain from pronouncing the name of the animal.

When I asked a Bhumia for the text of some snake charms, he felt very reluctant to tell me the names of some poisonous snakes. He said that if he pronounced their names, they might come and attack him.

In a village near Dindori, a woman had stepped on a snake. Though the snake did not strike the woman, the offering of a coconut (*naryal*) before a burning light was thought necessary in order to protect the woman from further harm. When visitors asked for the reason of the offering they were told what had happened, but the name of the snake was never uttered. Instead of 'snake' they used the word 'string' (*dora*).

At Bijora, some women were pressing oil out of *ramtila* seeds. When asked by visitors whether it was *ramtila* that they were pressing the women replied: 'No, it is *jagni*.' When the visitors pointed out to the women that *jagni* was just another word for *ramtila*, the women replied: 'No, no. It is something else.' Afterwards it was explained to the visitors that *ramtila* and *jagni* were indeed different names for the same thing, but the women were afraid to pronounce the more common name of *ramtila*. They feared that by calling the seeds *ramtila*, they would get less oil.

## 2. SOOTHSAYING

While the magician (*panda*) is believed to possess superhuman powers through the assistance rendered to him by some superhuman force, the soothsayer (*gunia*) is supposed to have superhuman knowledge which he acquires in each particular case by various methods and devices. Unlike the magician (*panda*), the soothsayer almost never falls into a trance or into fits when he is at work. His method of finding the truth behind certain otherwise inexplicable facts, which

baffle the ignorant aboriginal mind, or of showing a way out of misfortune or disease, is by divination only, not by magic. The soothsayer's task is to diagnose a case, to play the intermediary between man and the superhuman powers by revealing to his clients what exactly these invisible powers demand from them.

The name *gunia* probably derives from the Sanskrit word *guna* which means: ability, virtue, power (magic). In other parts of Central India, in the Nimar District for instance, the soothsayer is called *janka*, i.e. the 'man who knows'. My informants said that Brahmins and Pardhans never practised divination (*guniai*). Among the aborigines of eastern Mandla, the Bhumia have the best reputation as efficient soothsayers.

Many situations occur, which Gond and Bhumia for lack of other explanations attribute to the interference of superhuman powers. Particularly when they fall sick, their first thought is not to look for natural causes, but to find out which evil spirit has caused the trouble and the reason for the harm he is doing. The soothsayer, therefore, who pretends to stand in communication with the mysterious powers of the other world is much in demand for such consultations. At least one, but usually several such soothsayers can be found in every village. Any one might try his luck at divination; if he fails in his diagnosis, it does not matter much; but if he is successful in a number of cases, his reputation is soon established and clients come even from other villages to consult him. Quite often the men who practise this trade are persons with a distaste for hard work. They prefer to earn their living in this more comfortable manner.

The different methods of divination can easily be learned from more experienced soothsayers. They practise their trade openly before the public; they have no secrets. But it appears that a certain psychic ability or inclination is necessary to be a successful soothsayer.

There are several methods of divination employed by expert soothsayers; most common, however, are the following three: one by means of a winnowing fan and a gourd, another by using *urda* grains wrapped in a green leaf, and the third by measuring reeds of *chirra* grass (*Themeda laxa* Stapf.).



For divination, by means of a winnowing fan and a gourd, the soothsayer takes a handful of *kodai* grains, waves them with a circular motion over the head of his client and pours them into a winnowing fan (*supā*). Then he burns incense (*hum*) and prays that his divination may be successful. While he rubs the palm of his hand over the winnowing fan covered with *kodai* grains, another man, his assistant (*chela*, disciple), who sits facing him and holds a hollow gourd (*lauki*) containing a few grains of *kodai* and rice in his hands, looks with attention at the soothsayer. The latter, after addressing his gods<sup>2</sup> and reciting certain invocations, starts asking certain questions. First he tries to discover which god or spirit has caused the sickness or sent the misfortune. Then he tries to find out how the offended spirit can be appeased or supplicated for help. As soon as the soothsayer mentions the name of the god or spirit responsible for the client's sickness or misfortune, the gourd in the hand of the soothsayer's assistant receives a jerk, and a rattling sound is heard. The same happens when the soothsayer after innumerable questions mentions the gift or offering which the offended deity demands in order to be appeased or to cure the patient. If the disciple of the *gunia*, however, does not feel the jerk and if he fails to start shaking, in spite of all the efforts of the soothsayer, the conclusion is drawn that the sickness is caused by *Bhagwan* himself. Once they are convinced of this, they abandon all attempts at soothsaying, and merely apply natural remedies.

Instead of *kodai* on a winnowing fan, the diviner may also use *urda* grains in a leaf-cup. The procedure is similar.

Some soothsayers divine by means of a winnowing fan and an earthen lamp (*diya*). It is done at night. The soothsayer, sitting on the floor with his legs crossed, holds in his left hand the winnowing scoop upside down. With his right index finger dipped first in sweet oil, he draws two diagonal lines over the

<sup>2</sup> Dhuri, my Gond informant, invokes the following gods when he performs *guniai*: *Thakur deo*, *Bara deo*, *Hanuman-Mahavir*, *Narbada Mai*, *Dasai Devi*, *Kali*, *Bhuri Mai*, *Marahai Mai*, *Marghat ki Mari*, *Narayan deo*, *Dulha deo*, *Rat Mai*, *Bhawani Mata*, *Mara deo*, *Holera deo*, *Marki deo*, *Chalidar* and *Ghamsen*.

winnowing fan, beginning with the left top corner. Then he makes obeisance with folded hands. After that he places a small earthenware saucer, filled with oil and holding a burning cotton wick, near the open rim of the winnowing scoop. Holding the lamp with his left hand, he begins swinging it slowly to and fro. He commences with asking questions, imploring the gods to tell him the truth and to reveal the cause of the malady or misfortune. As long as the flame of the lamp flutters in the breeze or through the motion of the soothsayer, there is no answer to his questions. But when the flame suddenly burns straight and bright, the soothsayer assumes that the spirit or ghost has answered his question in the affirmative. In this manner the soothsayer first finds out the name of the evil spirit responsible for the sickness or accident, then the manner in which the spirit can be appeased and the offerings he expects.

Another method of divination is the following: The diviner gathers a small pile of *kodo* on the floor. On the pile he places a *lota* full of water. On the *lota* (brass pot) he places a wooden stool (*pirhwa*), on which his assistant (*chela*) squats. To put him into the right mood, the assistant is a few times quickly turned around, the stool rotating easily on the brass pot. The soothsayer now takes some rice grains (*chawal*), throws some grains on his assistant and begins with his questioning. He inquires which god was responsible for the disease or misfortune and quickly recites the names of a number of gods. The man on the stool receives a jerk and starts trembling when the god responsible for the complaint is mentioned. The same happens when the kind of offering which the god demands for appeasement is mentioned.

The easiest method of divination seems to be the one in which reeds of *chirra* grass are used. In each house one finds brooms made of the reeds of this grass. The diviner picks some reeds from a broom and, after beating the thicker ends gently on the ground, he measures the length of the reeds with the four fingers of his hand. He does this three times. Then he cuts off the reeds that are longer than twelve fingers breadth. After reciting certain incantations (*mantra*), he asks a question: for instance, which spirit or god had caused



the trouble. This question is answered again by measuring the reeds. If they now appear somewhat longer than before, the answer is taken to be in the affirmative; if the reeds now seem shorter than at the first measuring, a negative answer is assumed. The measuring of the reeds naturally depends on how tightly the soothsayer presses his fingers when he measures the reeds. There is, however, no evidence that the diviners deliberately 'cheat'. But it frequently happens that the reeds seem either longer or shorter at the second scrutiny. The *gunia* himself seems with all sincerity to believe that in this manner the truth of the matter is revealed.

It is, indeed, remarkable how often patients benefit from this divination. Some get instantly well after a competent soothsayer has diagnosed their case and advised the right offerings. I was told of several such striking cases. To quote only a few instances: At Duhania, a woman was down with high fever and severe heart trouble. The compounder of the Catholic Mission Hospital could not give the woman any relief and indeed had little hope of the woman's recovery. But the relatives of the patient consulted a soothsayer with the result that the next day the woman was completely cured. She was up and doing quite well, though on the previous day she had been unable even to move. It was certainly no case of hysteria.

In another case, a young woman had terrible pains in her ear. For several days the patient came to the dispensary for treatment. But as she could not get any relief, she went to a soothsayer and was cured instantly.

There are of course many cases when a diviner fails to effect a cure. Soothsayers are usually quite ready with an explanation for their failure. But sometimes their inability has tragic consequences, as instanced in the following case. In a village near Duhania, cholera broke out and twenty-four persons succumbed to the disease; the rest took to flight and went to another village. The villagers were warned not to receive the guests from the infected village, or the infection might spread to their village also. But the over-confident soothsayer of the village said: 'Let them come. I shall keep the spirit of disease (*bhut*) at bay.' After three days, how-

ever, he himself was dead, and twelve others also died of cholera.

On another occasion, a patient came to the dispensary at Duhania with sore eyes. He got his medicine, but soon afterwards went to a soothsayer who advised him not to use the prescribed medicine. He promised to cure him by divination. The man's eyes, however, got worse. When he could no longer bear the pain in his eyes, he came back to the dispensary. He was just in time to save his eyes. In this particular case, too, the divination of the soothsayer proved ineffectual.

### 3. THE BIDA CEREMONY

When a village is being ravaged by an epidemic, by cholera for instance, the Gond and Bhumia believe that a special ceremony is called for to make the goddess of disease depart from the village. This ceremony is called *gaon banana* (to rebuild the village) or *bida* (farewell).

It is the task of the soothsayer (*gunia*) to conduct the ceremony in which the goddess of disease is requested to leave the village. First, the *gunia* must find out whether the performance of the *bida* rite would be of any use at all. For the anxious villagers are afraid that their attempt at driving the goddess away might offend her the more and make her slay even more victims. When the soothsayer is able to set them at ease in this regard, he is requested to make all the necessary preparations for the *bida* ceremony.

First he builds a toy-cart, a so-called *garhi* (cart). It consists of small pieces of planks standing on two round wooden slabs as wheels. The 'wheels' are about four inches in diameter, and the cart is about a foot in length and breadth. The whole structure is painted red (with *gairu matti*, red clay), white (with *chuna*, lime), yellow (with *hardi*, turmeric), and decorated with reeds taken from a broken winnowing fan or a broom and with maize grains (*lai*).

After this, a goat of brown colour must be procured. The money for its purchase is collected by public subscription (*chanda*), each villager contributing his share.

Now all the men of the village, with the soothsayer at the head of the procession, proceed to the outskirts of the village.



The *gunia* himself carries the diminutive cart, and the bottom piece of a broken earthenware pitcher. Its bottom side is decorated with criss-cross lines of white, red and yellow colour. The *gunia* also drives the goat.

At a spot where two roads intersect, somewhat outside the village, but still well within its boundaries, the toy-cart is put on the ground and the potsherd placed at its side. The villagers also deposit there the old baskets and winnowing fans which they brought along from their houses. These articles may not be put to any use afterwards. The idea is to send the goddess off in the cart and to give her some parting gifts in the form of discarded baskets and winnowing fans. The goat too forms part of such a gift. It is not killed in sacrifice, but just driven out of the village and chased into the jungle. This ceremonial chasing away of the goat is called *nikasi*. Sometimes, when the money collected is insufficient for the purchase of a goat, a fowl is substituted and chased into the jungle. My informants did not know the significance of the broken pot (*khapri*, shard). Probably it is regarded as another vehicle by which the goddess might leave the village.

After this ceremonial send-off of the goddess of disease, two or three coconuts are broken and the fragments are distributed among the assembled villagers. Sometimes small chickens (or even a he-goat) are killed by the soothsayer; the animals are however not sacrificed to any deity, not even to the goddess of the disease. Afterwards the villagers go to a place near a river where they prepare a meal. They eat the meat of the animals killed by the *gunia* with rice and pulses.

In years when an epidemic has visited a village, the *bida* ceremony must be performed in the month of *Jeth* (October), after *Dasehra*. In other years the ceremony may be omitted.

There is no doubt that the Gond and Bhumia have borrowed this rite from the non-tribals. For this ceremony is widespread all over India. We find it with almost identical rites in Central India,<sup>3</sup> in Gujarat and in the Deccan,<sup>4</sup> as also in Bihar.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. L. Jungblut (1948): pp. 8 and 122; W. Koppers (1948): pp. 244 ff.

<sup>4</sup> J. J. Modi (1911): pp. 96-103.

<sup>5</sup> E. A. Gait (1902): p. 193.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### MAGIC CURE OF A SNAKE-BITE

THERE ARE many snakes which Bhumia and Gond believe to be poisonous: the *khariya* or cobra (*Naia tripudians*). *Khariya* literally means 'white clay' or 'white-ant'. This name is given to the cobras because they often live in the mounds raised by white-ants. Another poisonous snake is called *adhesar* (*Perlups ptyaskorros?*). Half of the upper part of its body is plain black, the other half towards the tail has white stripes across the body. The *parauon* (?) is about a cubit in length, and has brown and black spots, as big as a rupee. Equally poisonous is the *mahamandal* (?); this snake is similar in colour to the *parauon*, but the spots are smaller. The snake called *sonatar* (?) is believed to be very poisonous. It is similar to the *mahamandal*, but its spots are yellow. The *karait* (*Bungarus coeruleus*) is about a cubit in length, with white stripes. It is very poisonous. The *koili* is somewhat thicker than a cobra. It is black like coal, hence the name.

The fact that so many snakes are poisonous is explained by the Bhumia in the following myth: Formerly only the Asariya snake (?) was full of poison. The other snakes were all harmless and stayed in Utra khand, the realm of *Burha Nang*, the king of the snakes, and his wife *Dudh Nang* (Milk Snake). Both these snakes are still good and have no poison in their bodies.

One day *Burha Nang* sent *Asariya Nang* to Singar dip to have a look at the world. The *Asariya Nang* went up to Singar dip through a canal which from an ant-hill reaches down into Utra khand. On the ant-hill sat an Ahir Patel (cattle grazer) grazing his cattle and playing the flute. When the *Asariya Nang* came out of the hole, he bit the Ahirya who fell down and died. His flute fell from his hands down to the ground. But a gentle breeze (through *Hawa Pawan*,



the god of the winds) blew and the flute emitted a sigh. The Asariya Nang thought: 'What is that? I bit the Ahirya and put so much poison into his body; still he did not yet die, for his flute continues to play.' He put his mouth to the wound and sucked all the poison out. The Ahirya revived when the poison left him and got up. He collected all his cattle and went home.

The Asariya Nang returned to Utra khand and called all the snakes to a meeting before *Burha Nang*. There in the panchayat, the Asariya Nang related his experience and said: 'I do not want to keep all the poison in my stomach. After all, it is of no use. I bit an Ahir, but he did not die.' *Burha Nang* commanded the Asariya Nang to spit out all the poison on the ground. The snake did so. Since that time the Asariya snake is poisonous no more though it hisses like a poisonous one.

Now *Burha Nang* called all the other snakes and said: 'Well, the Asariya Nang does not want to keep any poison in its belly. Angry because the Ahirya boy did not die when Asariya Nang bit him, he now refuses to keep any poison. Will you now take his share or not?'

All the snakes agreed to take a share of the poison which the Asariya Nang had spat on the ground. And *Burha Nang* distributed the poison among the snakes present: he gave most of it to the *khariya* and *parauon* snakes, they were biggest in size. But the biggest of all, *Ajgar Nang*,<sup>1</sup> the python (*Python molurus*), refused his share. The water snake (*Dharwa*) and the Mellori snake also did not accept any poison. The *Chargorya* snake (about four feet long) got some poison, but not much. The scorpion (*bichhi*), who is a female, had her hands full of cow-dung, for she was just cleaning her house. She said: 'I cannot take any poison, my hands are full of cow-dung.' But *Burha Nang* tied the poison into the strip of her *dhoti* which hangs down at the back. Since that time the scorpion stings with her tail. The *Bhumia* believe that a scorpion's poison is stronger than that of any snake, because all snakes die when stung by a scorpion.

<sup>1</sup> *Ajgar*, in Sanskrit: *Ajagara*, literally means 'devouring goats'.

When all the snakes, with the above mentioned exceptions, had taken their share of the poison, *Burha Nang* sent them up to Singar dip. Since that time snakes are poisonous and kill human beings wherever they meet them.<sup>2</sup>

Gond and Bhumia of eastern Mandla do not really worship snakes. They are permitted to kill any snake except the python (*ajgar*), for this snake is considered virtuous (*dharma*). When a python comes to a house, people give it a cup of boiled milk. They believe that a python would not drink the milk unboiled. The python is also called *Nang deo* (snake god). However, not all Bhumia or Gond are so kind to the python. Some chase it away without giving any milk; and if it has killed a chicken or a young goat, they may even kill it. Gond and Bhumia are not afraid of the python; my informants had never heard of a python ever attacking men.

#### *A Snake Exorcism*

In July 1945, a Bhumia was bitten at Bijora by an Adhesar snake. The snake had been hiding under his bed and when the man went to bed, the snake bit him in his leg. When the man realized what had happened, he called for his neighbours at once. The snake was caught and its spine broken so that it could not escape, but it was not killed. For the Bhumia believe that if they killed a snake the patient must also die. The Adhesar snake is believed to be so poisonous that a man bitten by it is sure to die with cruel pains after two and a half days, unless proper remedies are applied. A Bhumia, therefore, in whose medicines the villagers have much confidence, went into the jungle to collect the roots and herbs required for the cure.

Meanwhile, all the men of the village, in particular the relatives and caste-fellows of the patient, assembled at his house. They sat down and started to discuss the accident and to consider what they ought to do to save the patient. One or the other of the men brought medicines which they believed would be helpful in the case. At last a relative of the man

<sup>2</sup> A similar legend about the origin of venom in snakes is related by the Munda in Jashpur (former Eastern States Agency), now Madhya Pradesh. Cf. V. Rosner (1958): p. 485.



who had been bitten went to the soothsayer of a neighbouring village and invited him to perform the snake exorcism. However, the soothsayer alone is helpless in such a case. He needs a man who is in the habit of being possessed by *Thakur deo* himself. This man is called *barwa*, as distinct from the *panda* who gets possessed by a *bhut* or *mata*. Such a *barwa* is indispensable in a snake exorcism. Luckily such a man was available in the village itself.

When the *gunia* arrived, he and the villagers who knew the songs of the snake exorcism, began to sing, calling *Thakur deo* down on the *barwa*. This prayer usually takes a long time. Even if the soothsayer is very powerful, the *barwa* takes about an hour till he is sufficiently worked up to fall into a trance. But often it requires several hours of singing. Sometimes a famous diviner must be called from a distant village to put the *barwa* to sleep. At Bijora, while the *gunia* led the choir and did not allow any break in the incessant chanting, the *barwa* sat quietly in a corner of the room, smoking his pipe and waiting patiently for *Thakur deo* to possess him. Meanwhile the men sang the following hymn:

*Uwa uwa chand surajwa to bina jage andhyara*  
*Uwa uwa moon sun without thee is darkness*

*Talnin bapre tel karhai tel bar unjyala*  
 Wife of the oil-presser, oh! press out oil to light the lamp

*Laguni ke pirholi, tai lan, Barhaiya*  
 The stool for the exorcism bring, wife of the carpenter

*Laguni ke haradi, tai lan, Kachhniya*  
 The turmeric for the exorcism bring, wife of the gardener

*Phir laguni ke diya, tai lan, Kumharin*  
 The earthen lamp for the exorcism bring, wife of the brick-maker

*Sone ke gudhari, tai lan, Badaniya.*  
 The golden head-roll bring, wife of the bracelet-maker.

The words 'uwa-uwa' at the beginning of the song have no

special significance. They are just vowels which are sung to get the right pitch for the chanting. The song is a poetical enumeration of the things and articles which are required for the exorcism: Oil for a lamp, a wooden stool (*pirha*), a roll of strings or cloth (*gurhni*) used by women to ease the pressure on the head when carrying a waterpot, turmeric (*hardi*) and an earthen lamp.

While the men are singing this hymn, other men actually bring the articles mentioned in the song in preparation for the *hum* sacrifice which is now to be performed. They bring a *pirha* (low stool) which they place in front of the *barwa*. Then a man pours a handful of *kodai* (husked *kodo*) on the stool in a longish pile, and by moving the pile alternately to the right and to the left he forms the figure of a curling snake. The mouth and the tail of the snake are also roughly but skilfully depicted. The mouth of the snake is directed towards the man. Then he places at the right side of the figure of the snake a pearl necklace (*guriya*) worn by men and women. The pearls are arranged in such a way that they form the figure of a spotted snake. The man opens the sling at one end of the pearl necklace so that it resembles the mouth of a snake. The necklace is placed in such a position near the figure of the snake made of *kodai*, that the mouth of the snake represented by the necklace rests at the tail end of the snake made of *kodai*.

At the other side of the snake made of *kodai*, the man places a *gurhni* (roll of cloth or strings which the women put on their head when they carry a load), and upon the *gurhni* a pear-shaped brass vessel (*lota*). On the *lota* he puts an earthen saucer (*diya*) filled with *ramtila* oil. He puts a cotton wick into the oil and lights it. It is believed that *Thakur deo* is present in the *lota* filled with spring water, and in the light. Or, as my informant Musra puts it tersely: '*Deo lota men, Deo pani men, Deo diya men—sab kuchh Thakur deo*' ('God is in the *lota*, god is in the water, god is in the lamp—all that is *Thakur deo*').

Now the foremost among the soothsayers present is asked to perform the *hum* sacrifice. He brings fire in a smouldering dung-cake which he places before the *lota* with the light



on it. The diviner pours gum of the *Sarai* tree (*rar*) on the fire, reciting, as he does so, a prayer (*mantra*) to *Thakur deo*. The text of this prayer remains his secret which he does not disclose to anyone. In this *hum* sacrifice, the gum of the *Sarai* tree is never supplanted by oil or clarified butter as in other sacrifices of this kind.

After this *hum* sacrifice which is performed for the purpose of inviting *Thakur deo* to enter into the *barwa*, a man takes the pearl-necklace at the tail end and waves it slowly from head to foot over the body of the patient; then along the ground to the wooden stool and around the snake formed by the pile of *kodai*. After that he puts the necklace back in its place. This ceremony has the purpose of drawing the poison from the patient back into the snake, which is represented by the *kodai* figure. This rite is repeated several times while the soothsayer with his choir sings another hymn inviting *Thakur deo* to come and cure the patient. The song runs as follows:

*Kekhar gaiya char phir lauthe kekhar gay banwas*  
Whose cow grazing has again returned, whose cow grazing  
in the jungle?

*Brahma ke gaiya char phir lauthe, Thakur deo ke gay banwas*

Brahma's cow grazing again returned, *Thakur deo's* cow in  
the jungle

*Bhurbhuri dongri ke rakat Masan, gaiya berhi lei chale.*  
Blood-sucking Masan of the Bhurbhuri hill,<sup>3</sup> take away the  
cow tied up.

*Phir dhaurho, dhaurho gohar, mor Thakur deo*  
Again run, run and cry for help, my *Thakur deo*

*Gaiya la utari la no re, mor Thakur deo*  
Cow, bring down, bring down my *Thakur deo*

*Baitho re, Thakur deo, mor khowa authai*  
Sit down, *Thakur deo*, stir up my cream

<sup>3</sup> Masan is a blood-sucking vampire, living in graveyards and dangerous to passers-by.

*Kon tohi bhandh rakhe re? mor Thakur deo*  
Who keeps you tied up, my Thakur deo?

*Kahan na bhulai gai, mor Thakur deo?*  
Where did you get lost, my Thakur deo?

*Sodhe tohi bandh rakhe re,<sup>4</sup> mor Thakur deo?*  
Has a witch tied you up, my Thakur deo?

*Guni tohi bandh rakhe re, mor bara Thakur deo?*  
Has a gunia tied you up, my great Thakur deo?

This song is repeated till the *barwa* at last begins to shiver and tremble and to roll his head from one side to the other. This is a sign that *Thakur deo* is taking possession of the man. When this symptom appeared on our *barwa* at Bijora, the soothsayer asked him whether the patient would recover or not. The *barwa*, in a trance replied: '*Unjiyala dekhta*' ('I see light'). This was his way of saying that the patient would recover. Had the *barwa* replied: '*Andhera hai, unjiyala nahin dekhta*' ('It is dark, I do not see any light'), it is believed that the patient would have died. Musra said that the *barwa* never makes a mistake in his prophecy. Two years ago, two men had been bitten by a snake. In both cases the *barwa* stated that he could not see any light, and both men had in fact died.

If the snake which bit the man could not be caught, and if it is not even known what snake bit him, the name of the snake must be found out by divination. It is done by the recitation of the following song which the soothsayer now intones:

*Indal dolei badal dolei jimmi aur jamun dip*  
The sky rocks, the cloud shakes, and the island of the earth

*Charho, charho, Raja Burha Nang*  
Exorcise, exorcise, king Burha Nang

<sup>4</sup> According to my informant Musra a witch has no effective power over *Thakur deo*, but she can prevent him from curing the man who has been bitten by a snake.



*Phir charho, charho, mor Dudh Nang*  
Then exorcise, exorcise, my *Dudh Nang*

*Phir charho, charho, Raja Basuk Nang*  
Exorcise, exorcise, king *Basuk Nang*

*Phir charho, charho, mor Khariya nang*  
Then exorcise, exorcise, my cobra

*Phir charho, charho, mor Gahuwa nang*  
Then exorcise, exorcise, my wheat-coloured snake

*Phir charho, charho, mor Koili nang*  
Then exorcise, exorcise, my coal-black snake

*Phir charho, charho, mor Adhesar nang*  
Then exorcise, exorcise, my *Adhesar* snake

*Phir charho, charho, mor Parauon nang.*  
Then exorcise, exorcise, my *Parauon* snake.

This song goes on interminably until the snake which bit the man is named. Then the *barwa* receives a jerk and falls into convulsions, a sign that the snake which bit the man has been found.

The *Bhumia* maintain that they know quite well which snakes are poisonous and which are not. But they are convinced that a man can be cured by this exorcism, even if he was bitten by the most poisonous snake. It depends entirely on *Thakur deo* whether the patient will recover or not. But even if the *barwa's* verdict points to death, hope is not quite abandoned. They at least continue to apply their natural remedies. Nor does the soothsayer stop his incantations. From time to time he also repeats the *hum* sacrifice, though with less conviction and more to please *Thakur deo*. He also tries to find out what evil spirit or god was responsible for the accident and how the offended deity could be appeased. For this purpose the soothsayer now intones the following song, the refrain of which is taken up by his choir:

*Hus husari husari, mar musari, kon deo khais?*

*Hus husari husari, beat the grain-pestle, what god has smitten him?*

*Mai, mar musari, Bare deo khais*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle, *Bara deo* has smitten him

*Mai, mar musari, mor Thakur deo khais*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle, my *Thakur deo* has smitten him

*Mai, mar musari, mor Narayan deo khais*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle, my *Narayan deo* has smitten him

*Mai, mar musari, Khet ke Chhahura deo khais.*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle, the field's *Chhahura deo* has smitten him

*Mai, mar musari, Alauha Purbya khais*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle, *Alauha Purbya* has smitten him

*Mai, mar musari, Rat Mai khais*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle, *Rat mai* has smitten him

*Mai, mar musari, Andhiri deo khais*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle, the god of 'Darkness has smitten him

*Mai, mar musari, guni ke deo khais*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle, the soothsayer's god has smitten him

*Mai, mar musari, sodhe ke deo khais*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle, the god of the witch has smitten him

*Mai, mar musari.*  
 Mother, beat the grain-pestle.

It is believed that as soon as the singers pronounce the name of the god responsible for the accident, the *barwa* receives a jerk in his body and falls to the ground in convulsions. As soon as the superhuman power responsible for the accident has been discovered, the soothsayer tries to find out how the offended deity can be placated. This is done usually by divination with the reeds of *chirra* grass taken from a



broom. If the reeds appear longer at the second measurement, the soothsayer holds out hope for the patient's recovery. But if the reeds appear shorter than at the first measurement, he shakes his head and announces that the patient is going to die. However, his verdict is not final. The divination (*sagun*) is repeated several times to exclude any mistake or to find out whether the spirit responsible for the accident has changed his mind.

One of my informants privately expressed his doubts about these machinations of the soothsayer. He said that the *gunia* intently watches the face and state of health of the patient and arranges the result of his divination accordingly. When he believes that the patient will recover, he presses his fingers together so that the reeds appear longer than at the first measurement. If he has no longer any hope of the patient's survival, he holds his fingers slightly apart. This may be done deliberately or unconsciously.

It is believed that, indeed, sometimes after an offering performed by the diviner the deity, who sent the snake to punish the man, feels appeased and permits the patient's recovery. In the case of the Bhumia who had been bitten at Bijora, it was found that the accident was brought about by *Alauha deo* who now demanded the sacrifice of a fowl and a coconut for the recovery of the patient. The offering was made and the patient in fact recovered a day later.

After the man had been cured, a coconut was offered on the porch of his house in thanksgiving to *Thakur deo*. The men who had attended the exorcism were served a bottle of liquor.

The soothsayer and the *barwa*, who had made such great efforts for the patient's recovery, received no reward. In times past a *barwa* was paid a fee of four annas, but now receives nothing, not even a meal. If he is called from another village and it gets dark before he can return to his home, he may stay overnight in the house of a relative or friend. Only if there is nobody to receive him into his house, does the family of the patient give him a meal and a bottle of liquor. But he is given some foodstuff only from which he has to prepare his own meal. He may not accept food prepared in the house of the patient.

The Bhumia who had been bitten at Bijora is now completely cured. Soon after his recovery he was able to go to his field to work. Nobody expressed the suspicion that the man had committed a sin for which he was bitten by a snake. My informants were of the opinion that sometimes even good people were bitten by snakes.

A few years ago it happened in some village that a Bhumia was bitten by a snake. The accident occurred in the jungle. The man ran home as quickly as he could, but a few furlongs from his house he broke down. Somebody found him and carried him home. When the patient's father heard what had happened, he went at once to the Catholic missionary living in a neighbouring village and asked for medicine. The missionary came and injected him with an antidote. But as considerable time had passed since the young man was bitten, the poison was already taking its effect and the patient began to vomit. His wound started swelling and gave him much pain.

Since the missionary's medicine did not seem to have any effect, the patient's father called a soothsayer. He could not find any in the first village; he therefore proceeded to a second and third village, until he found a competent *gunia* willing to perform the exorcism. After a two days' absence the father returned with the diviner; he found his son still alive but at death's door. The swelling had already reached the hip, and no one entertained any hope of the patient's recovery.

The diviner, assisted by the villagers and caste fellows of the patient, started his exorcism. They sang the snake songs, made the *hum* sacrifice and since the snake which bit the man had not been found, they just beat the ground with a stick, showing thereby that they were breaking the back of the snake. But in spite of all these efforts of the soothsayer, the patient was sinking fast. The natural remedies which they applied were also of no avail.

At last the soothsayer suggested a sacrifice to *Thakur deo*. After a long discussion two men were found ready to perform the sacrifice. They went to the shrine of *Thakur deo* at Bijora. But the cock, which they were going to sacrifice, refused to eat the *kodo* grain spread out before it. This was



a sign that the god did not accept the sacrifice. The men, therefore, went to the shrine of *Thakur deo* in a neighbouring village. There too the cock refused to pick up even a few grains. But when the men visited the shrine of *Thakur deo* in a third village, the cock ate the *kodo* and was quickly sacrificed.

When the men returned after this sacrifice, they heard that the patient was well on the way to recovery and was now out of danger. When the men related their difficulties in getting the cock sacrificed, an old man trotted out the explanation that *Thakur deo* was naturally a busy god and could not be expected to be at all places at the same time. He must have been busy in another village, the old man said, when the two Bhumia wanted to consult him at Bijora and then at Dullopur. They had been lucky to find him at Bijapur.

By divination it was found out later that *Thakur deo* himself had been responsible for the young man's accident. However, the soothsayer pointed out that the accident had really been a blessing in disguise: When the young man drove his bullocks into the jungle, four tigers were waiting for him. The man and the animals were only saved through the snake-bite: the man ran home and the bullocks followed him. And, therefore, an offering was due to *Thakur deo* for his protection from the tigers.

My informants maintained that no other god can cure a person from snake-poison except *Thakur deo*. When I asked them whether *Bhagwan* (*Parmatma*) could not cure a man bitten by a poisonous snake, they admitted that *Bhagwan*, too, could effect a cure. As a matter of fact, the Bhumia said, they prayed first to *Parmatma* for a cure before they invoked the help of *Thakur deo*. But this prayer was recited in silence, not aloud.

## CHAPTER XXVII

# MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

### 1. THE PANDA

ANYONE who easily and frequently falls into fits is called a *panda*. The word *panda* is a Hindi word. It means a 'priest of holy places, or worshipper at a temple'. For the Gond and Bhumia, however, this word has a different meaning. It signifies a man or woman who is in contact with superhuman powers. To the Gond and Bhumia, the strange ability of falling into a trance is a sign that a spirit (*bhut*) or goddess (*mata*) has taken possession of the man or woman and endowed him (or her) with superhuman power. It is generally the so-called *Marai mata* who takes possession of a *panda*, though occasionally other deities may also do it.

*Marai mata*<sup>1</sup>, whom one of my informants called a dreadful goddess, is probably not a genuine deity of the Gond or Bhumia pantheon, but imported from southern India. Possibly the Mahar, a low Hindu caste of weavers and village watchmen of the Deccan and the southern part of Madhya Pradesh, introduced her worship into eastern Mandla. It is significant that no Brahmin in eastern Mandla can become a *panda*; for, it was explained to me, Brahmins do not venerate *Marai mata*. Strange to say, the Pardhan also never worship *Marai mata* nor do they ever get possessed by the goddess. But wherever we find Mahar, there is also a shrine of this deity. 'She it is who comes in the form of cholera; and when an epidemic of this disease breaks out she is propitiated by public sacrifice in which the Mahars take a leading part. There is no image of *Mariai* (the Mahars call her by this name) in human shape. She is represented by a row of small stones, usually seven in number and daubed with red lead.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. Whitehead (1921): pp. 115 ff.



In certain parts of the Nagpur District, this image on the east of the village is known as *Mata* or *Gramdevi*, that is Mother or Village Goddess.<sup>2</sup> *Marai* means in Hindi a hut standing on the threshing floor. *Marai mata* is thus obviously only another name for *Anadai*, which means 'grain-mother'. This goddess of eastern Mandla is also a fertility goddess. However, *Marai mata* or *Anadai* are in truth only different names or epithets of the earth-mother, *Prithwi* or *Dharti mata*, who also combines in her title of 'Goddess of Fertility' that of 'Goddess of Disease'. The goddess sends an epidemic when she feels that the soil is exhausted and needs rejuvenation through a number of human deaths. This she brings about through an epidemic.

The fact that it is a borrowed deity, which takes possession of the *panda* and puts him into a trance, suggests that the whole complex of this form of magic is not of Gond or Bhumia invention, but is learned from non-tribals of low caste like the Mahar.

A man becomes a *panda* either by his own desire or by certain circumstances beyond his own control. Some young men learn by long association with the *panda* to fall into a trance—if the physical disposition is not completely absent. Others become *panda* all of a sudden, by the goddess's own selection, as they believe. My informant, Panga, gave an instance of this: A boy of his relationship once sat under a tree near his house, as he had often done before. One day all of a sudden he began to shiver and to tremble, affirming to his relatives that the *Mata* had taken possession of him. Since that day he was regarded as a *panda*.

Almost every village has its *panda*, and some villages have even more than one. At Bijora, a large village five miles from Dindori, there is, however, only one *panda*. He is by caste a Gond. The Bhumia of the village have no *panda* of their own. Formerly Musra was one, but he gave it up.

The *panda* is not a village priest like the *dewar*; he may be better called a family priest. His tutelary goddess protects him and his whole family. In return for this protection he

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Robertson (1938): p. 23.

worships her. It is a give-and-take arrangement.

Once a year, in the month of *Magh* (in December or January), on a fullmoon day, the *panda* has to make a pilgrimage in honour of his patroness. In preparation for this pilgrimage, he goes a few days earlier into the jungle and cuts a green bamboo pole, about nine cubits long. At home he wraps the whole pole up in long strips of white cloth or coils of bark ropes (of which the netting of a cot is also made). The *panda* then takes a trident (*tarsul*), sticks an areca nut (*supari*) on its middle point, and ties the trident with several peacock feathers to the top-end of the bamboo pole. A little below he ties two bamboo sticks crosswise, bends their ends upwards and ties them to the pole under the quills of the peacock-feathers in such a manner that they form two vertical circles set at right angle to each other. Then on strings he hangs slices of pumpkin (*khandri*, a pumpkin with white flowers) on these circles. The bottom-end of the sacred pole is stuck into what is called a shoe, but which is just a square board. From now on the pole should never be allowed to touch the ground. If that ever happened, the *panda* would be punished by sickness or even death, at least his eyes would start festering and he would get blind, or his cattle would die. The pole is, therefore, tied to a post which is set up in the centre of a mud platform near the veranda of the house. It is the place where the *panda* performs his usual offering to *Bhawani mata*.

If the *panda* owns bullocks of his own, he ties peacock-feathers to their neck-bells, a leather-strip beset with small bells (*bail ki ganthi*).

On the fullmoon day of the month of *Magh*, the relatives and followers of the *panda* assemble at his house. The *panda* ties strips of cloth or leather, beset with small bells (*naura*), around his ankles and a rope, plaited of the hair of cow-tails and about two cubits long, around the wrist of his right hand. The loose end he allows to dangle down. Then he fills a new basket (*dauri*) with husked rice and a coconut. He sticks a trident into the grain. Then he prepares another bamboo pole, about a cubit shorter than the one representing *Marai mata*. This shorter pole represents her husband, *Meari Marai*.



Around this pole also he wraps a white cloth or coils of bark rope.

Now a procession is formed: first walks the man who carries the sacred bamboo pole which represents *Marai mata* in a vertical position. The carrier rests the shoe in which the lower end of the bamboo pole is stuck on his stomach. If possible, the *panda* himself carries the pole. But if his state of trance does not allow him to do this or if the way is very long, another man may carry the pole. After him walks the carrier of the *Meari Marai* pole, then a man with the basket of rice. If the *panda* does not himself carry the sacred pole, he walks behind the carrier of the *Meari Marai* pole, then follows the man with the basket. Once I met a *panda* riding a horse on his way to the *Marai* fair. The *panda* is accompanied by a man beating a drum (*mandar*) and by an Ahir playing his bamboo flute (*bhansri*). The Ahir too wears ankle bells, and a stick in his hand. When he meets another Ahir on his way, he performs the stick dance with him. The *panda* blows at intervals into a horn (*sing*) or into a shell (*sang*).

The whole party is also joined by men who aspire to the dignity of a *panda*. They hope that on this pilgrimage the goddess herself, or at least a minor deity, might choose them as their special protégé. Other people too accompany the group. In time of sickness or distress some make a vow that they will carry the sacred bamboo pole to the fair. When a man makes this promise, he says the following prayer: '*Agar mein achchha hojaunga, to Marai bandhunga, aur bazaar ghumakar ghar men aunga. Aur jo kuchh bhik milega bazaar men, tereko charhaunga*' ('If I get cured, I shall bind a *Marai mata*, and after wandering around at the fair, I shall return home. And whatever alms I get at the fair, I shall offer to you'). The man who makes such a promise is called *admi jiska banda rahta hai*.

On the way, the *panda* and the Ahir dance and shout and work themselves into a frenzy. The nearer they get to Dindori, the more such processions join them. All proceed to the same destination, Dindori, where on this day a market is held. It is the Sunday after fullmoon (*punwasi*). The day

when the fair (*mela*) is to take place is announced a week earlier by the market sweeper (*mehtar*). There is a big concourse of people; the officials of the police and revenue department are also present. At the same time there is a similar fair at Shahpur, Bikrampur and Amarpur. The *panda* with their groups of followers and attendants do not only belong to the Gond and Bhumia tribes; the other castes too are well represented. High-caste people, especially Brahmins, are conspicuously absent. They do not worship *Marai mata*.

If the *panda* does not carry the sacred *Marai* pole all the way, he must at least take it over when he arrives at the fair. He tirelessly walks around in procession, and often makes a big show, pretending that the *mata* is very heavy, especially when wind is blowing. To keep the sacred pole in its vertical position, ropes are tied to the top of the pole and men hold the pole straight by these. When the *panda* gets tired of walking around, he goes to a spot where many posts are set up. There he ties his pole to one of the posts so that it may not touch the ground. Then he again dances and begs for alms from the people. Whatever he gets, he places before his sacred pole: some grain, a few sticks of lac, a *tikli* (star-shaped ornament), glass bangles (*churi*), or a hair-string (*phundra*).

After a while a general sacrifice is performed. One of the *panda* sacrifices a pig for all the poles. Then each *panda* offers coconuts and burns clarified butter and resins before his pole.

Like most religious fairs of India, the *Marai* fairs of eastern Mandla are also a welcome occasion for fanatics to display their stern acts of penance. At the *Marai* fair a ladder is erected. The *panda* climb up and before the big crowd of onlookers whip themselves with the rope of cow-tail hair which they had tied around the right wrist. At Bhirsingpur, the *panda* sometimes erect a ladder, the rungs of which consist of swords or knives. Famous *panda* climb up, without getting hurt. Others pierce their cheeks with swords, or dance on boards with nails protruding. Some kindle a bonfire, walk through it unhurt, and even sit down in the fire.



Bhirsingpur is famous for the feats of penance which the *panda* display there in public.

At last the *panda* leave the fair with their attendants and followers. On arrival at his house, each *panda* ties his pole to the post on the mud platform in his courtyard. The lower end of his pole should never touch the ground. Then he offers a coconut, daubs the pole with red lead (*sendhur*), and also the trident (*tarsul*) stuck in the ground before the pole. Then he decorates the sacred pole with all the bangles, hair-strings, lac sticks, etc., which he received at the fair. From the grain which he begged for, he prepares a meal to which he invites all his followers and friends.

Those *panda* whose tutelary deity is not *Marai mata* herself, but some other spirit, also take their sacred pole to the *Marai* fair like the *panda* whose patroness is *Marai mata*.

My Bhumia informant, Musra, who at one time had himself been a *panda* admits that this *Marai* pilgrimage is not a custom peculiar to the tribes of eastern Mandla. In eastern Mandla, the Gond and Bhumia, Panka, Mahra (Mahar), and Kori are the chief worshippers of *Marai mata*. Similar customs are found in parts of Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>3</sup> The untouchable Balahis in the western districts of Madhya Pradesh perform a similar pilgrimage with a bamboo pole.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. WITCHCRAFT

All tribes and castes of eastern Mandla believe in the evil potency of witchcraft and black magic. But Gond, and especially Bhumia, seem to be particularly suspicious and assume the agency of witchcraft where they have no natural explanation for anything untoward at hand. If a tree suddenly withers and dries up, if a bullock or cow gets sick, if in a family there is a series of accidents for which they cannot account in any way, they blame a witch. '*Banai se*', they declare. Once the suspicion that a witch has been at work is roused, they begin to investigate and to look around

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nanimadhab Chaudhuri (1939): Vol. V. No. 3. pp. 417-25.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. S. Fuchs (1950): p. 253 ff.

for a likely adept in black magic. Then people become dangerous, for their suspicion might fall on any one whom they hate or against whom they harbour a grudge. Those women who are disliked for some reason, fall especially easily under the suspicion of being witches. And once the shadow of such a suspicion falls on a woman, she is in danger of social ostracism. At Bijora, it happened that a woman in a quarrel was accused of being a witch (*sodhi*, from *jadu*, magic?). The accusation was repeated by others and, in the end, believed. The result was that the whole family of the woman had to leave the village and to settle at a distant place. The worst thing in such a case is that the victim cannot defend herself against such an accusation. The suspicion remains long inarticulate, and is spread in secret gossip and slander. Such an accusation is easily believed; for it is taken for granted by the aboriginals that there is a witch in practically every village.

Persons under the suspicion of being witches often suffer severely under this accusation. Women who are childless, especially if at the same time they are also ill-tempered and easily curse and abuse others, are in particular danger of being regarded as witches. Women sometimes fly into a temper; they let themselves go and curse and swear, and with the highest speed rattle down a whole series of curses, one worse than the other, cracking their finger-joints one after the other to emphasize their curses. If certain women lose control of themselves too often and quarrel too frequently, they can effectively be checked by voicing the suspicion that they are possessed by an evil spirit. The accusation of being a witch is taken very seriously by any woman.

Often it is the soothsayer who in case of sickness announces that a witch has been at work. By divination he then tries to find out who bewitched the patient. At Bijora, for instance, a Bhumia, Somhru by name, got small-pox. His whole body became one open sore and all thought that he was going to die. His relatives had already made him swallow a ring and a rupee, a sure sign that they despaired of his recovery. But Somhru maintained that his sickness was due to black magic and he named the woman who, as he believed, had



bewitched him. He requested that the woman be called and forced to remove the evil spell from him. A man went to call the woman, but she had gone to the market. She was a middle-aged Bhumia woman, without any children.

When she returned from the bazaar, she was summoned to Somrhu's house. She came and quietly asked Somrhu: 'Why has *Burhi Dai*, the goddess of small-pox, made you sick?' Somrhu replied: 'This is your work. You have made me sick and want me to die.' The woman denied everything and said that she wished him well and hoped that he would soon recover. Somrhu replied: 'Alright. If I recover, I shall forgive you and never more say that you are a witch.' Shortly afterwards Somrhu got better. He fully recovered and nobody ever dared to accuse the Bhumia woman of witchcraft.

It may also happen that a person is deliberately accused of witchcraft with the intention of getting rid of her. At Bijora, a woman wanted to get rid of her daughter-in-law. She began to accuse her of practising black magic. She said: 'Since you have come into the family, our cow was eaten by a tiger, my child died, and I myself got sick.' The woman is fully aware that her daughter-in-law will not much longer bear such accusations. One day she will either run away on her own or her husband will divorce her.

A woman accused of witchcraft cannot be formally tried by the village or caste council. A witch is found out either by divination, or by certain tests. Sometimes she is caught red-handed.

The following case of 'testing' witches is reported from a village not far from Bijora. It was a Gond farmer who made the test. He had a cow with calf. Within a short time both cow and calf died. The farmer would not have suspected black magic when the calf died, for this often happens. But when the cow also died shortly afterwards, he suspected foul play. He concluded that one of the women in the village was a witch. Thus, one day he called all the women of the village to his house. They came willingly, thinking that he was going to pay them for the work they had done in his field. But when they entered his courtyard, the Gond closed the gate and placed the village watchman (*kotwar*) at the

gate with an axe, threatening to chop off the head of any woman who tried to escape.

He then brought a crowbar (*sabbal*) and heated it in fire. When it was red-hot, he ordered the women to dip their hands into a pot with clarified butter which he had placed at his side. Then one woman after the other had to 'milk' the crowbar, that is: she had to grip the red-hot iron with both hands and let them glide down the full length of the crowbar, just as in milking a cow. It is reported that no woman burned her hands in this ordeal. This was taken as a proof that the women were all innocent.

Such ordeals are not rare among the Gond and Bhumia. But it appears that some people know tricks with which to escape from the harmful consequences of the ordeal. The woman under suspicion has, for instance, to plunge her hands into boiling *ghee* or oil to prove her innocence. It is said that no harm comes to her if the butter or oil is really boiling hot. Her hands will get burned, however, if the butter or oil is not sufficiently heated.

Gond and Bhumia, as also other tribes and castes living in eastern Mandla, believe that there is a time when it is easy to catch a witch. It is the time just after Diwari. During the fifteen days after Diwari not only the disciples of the *panda*, but the witches are busy learning new spells and repeating them over and over again. They usually do this at night. First they go to the shrine of their tutelary goddess, undress there and wander naked through the village lanes. Some courageous men get together and in the dead of night—it is the time of newmoon and quite dark—watch at a place which they believe is visited by the witches in their nightly hauntings. However, they do not dare catch the witches at that time, but try to get hold of their clothes after they have undressed at the shrine of their tutelary goddess. As soon as the witches have left their clothes behind and are off to the village, the men mark their cloths by burning holes into them. On their return, the witches dress again without knowing that their clothes have been marked, and in the morning when they leave their houses and go to the well or waterplace to fetch water, the men wait for them and recognize them by the holes



burned into their clothes. Then they summon the village council and accuse the women of being witches. If the women deny the charge, they are beaten with castor branches—other sticks are believed not to hurt them at all—till they confess their guilt.

I made repeated inquiries to ascertain how black magic is punished by caste or village communities. I was always told that there was no punishment for witchcraft. All that could be done was to supplicate or to render harmless the spirit which the witch had sent. They said that a witch was pardoned when she promised never to practise black magic again. In olden days, they admitted, a witch was tied in a bag and drowned in a river. But in present times witches were not punished. However, too many instances are known of witch trials to take such statements very serious. Witches may not be tried officially by caste or village councils as in the past. For if they were to punish witches according to tradition, they would have to condemn them to death. In modern times they would certainly be arrested by the police and prosecuted for murder, if they punished a witch.

It appears, however, to be frequently the case that punishment is meted out to a woman accused of witchcraft by private agencies. Many cases are known of such women who absconded or suddenly disappeared from their villages for ever. Such cases rarely come to the knowledge of the police. People who are convinced that witches ought to be punished with death are not inclined to make a report of the matter to the police or to come forward as witnesses. And it may happen that the very persons who investigate into the case also believe in witchcraft and think such a murder justified. For there can be no other punishment for a witch than death: any other punishment would give the witch a chance to avenge herself on the judges.

How people react to black magic is indicated by the following account. I give the local version of the story, not the police report. For it is the local version which shows what people really believe and how they act in alleged cases of witchcraft. At a village near Dindori lived a Gond whose name was Ghisla. In December 1943, one of his sons died,

leaving behind him a widow and a two-month-old child. The deceased was about twenty-five years old. A fortnight later another son of Ghisla also died; he was about ten years old. Ghisla now suspected his eldest son's wife of black magic. He called Vishnu, a soothsayer, who confirmed his suspicion and said that the woman was indeed a *sodhi*, a witch, and was therefore responsible for the death of his two sons.

In January 1944, the unfortunate woman disappeared. Soon her body was recovered from the river that flowed by the village. Some fishermen (*Dhimar*) who had been fishing in the river felt a heavy strain on their net and joyfully expected a big catch. But when they dragged their net out of the river, they found to their horror the mutilated body of a woman. They threw the body back into the river and decided to say nothing about their gruesome find, as they did not want to get involved in such a dangerous affair.

About a week later a Revenue inspector and a land surveyor (*patwari*) of Dindori passed by the spot where the corpse had been found by the fishermen. As the body was lying in shallow water, the men saw it and at once returned to Dindori to inform the police about it. The circle inspector, the station-house officer, a sergeant (*havildar*) and six constables went to the village to investigate the case. The body was dispatched to Dindori for a *post mortem*. The police doctor found that the woman had been killed by axe-blows, the wounds on the neck being three inches deep. It was found that the body had been wrapped up in a blanket, and stones had been tied to the arms and legs, with the obvious intention of keeping the body under water.

The police stayed eight days in the village for the purpose of investigation. All the villagers were held in custody; they were not permitted to talk to each other, nor even to go out for a call of nature. The women were prevented from carrying manure into their gardens. Only for one hour a day did they get leave to cook a hasty meal at home.

When Ghisla was questioned by the police, under pressure, he confessed that he had killed the woman with his axe and carried her to the river which is about a mile away. But it was pointed out to him that he could not have carried



the body alone, as he was a weak and ailing man. He was asked to disclose the identity of his accomplice. But Ghisla stoutly denied that he had any accomplice and repeated that he alone had murdered the woman and thrown her into the river.

The soothsayer who had been consulted by Ghisla absconded the very day on which the police arrived. He was, of course, at once suspected as an accomplice. When he did not return after eight days, a search warrant was issued against him. He was found after some time, dressed as a religious mendicant (*sadhu*), begging his way from village to village. A fellow villager recognized him in spite of his disguise and reported him to the police.

Meanwhile, the police officers made Ghisla lie down on his bed. The villagers were ordered to massage him very hard the whole day through in turns. The police-inspector said—so say the villagers—that as they were not allowed to beat him they wanted to wear him down by sheer kindness. Even if the man died after such treatment, nobody could accuse the police of cruelty. Ghisla's wife was treated in the same manner. She was massaged the whole day by women. But Ghisla remained obdurate. Nor did any other villager come forward with any information concerning the murder. Everyone was afraid of being brought to court and questioned in public; afraid also of the revenge of the culprits or their relatives if they disclosed anything incriminating.

When the soothsayer was brought up for investigation, he denied everything. After some time, both suspects had to be released for lack of evidence. The villagers, however, were of the opinion that in spite of all lack of co-operation the police officers would have been able to find the full truth, had they not quarrelled among themselves. In the course of the investigation they had become enemies and accused one another of unlawful practices. The result was that the case remained enigmatical and unsolved.

This is the local version of the case. I cannot vouch for the truth of the story, but I set it down to give the reader an idea of what people think of police investigation.

So much is certain, that most aboriginals of eastern Mandla

are firmly convinced of the existence of witches. With a conviction so firmly rooted in their mind they, of course, find ample proof for their belief in the evil potency of black magic. Incidents like the following may happen many times: A Bhumia near Duhania had a quarrel with a fellow villager, who cursed him and expressed the hope that the man might be bitten by a poisonous snake. And, as like as not, a few days afterwards the man was actually bitten by a snake. The Bhumia, of course, was convinced that his enemy had practised black magic and had sent the snake to bite him. He went at once to the house of his enemy and made ready to die in his house, stamping him thus as a murderer. But fortunately the snake was not a poisonous one, because the man soon recovered after some local medicines had been offered him. It was probably due only to shock that the man got sick at all. There is no doubt that the Bhumia's enemy would have been accused of black magic had the man died.

It is believed that black magic is learned either from persons who themselves practise witchcraft or in dreams. In most cases, it is the mother who, herself a witch, instructs her daughter in the secrets of black magic and teaches her the powerful spells (*mantra*) which give her power over some spirit. This spirit then serves the witch in her evil designs.

There are many stories current among the aboriginals of eastern Mandla about the orgies and gruesome rites which the witches perform in the service of their spirits. For it is believed that a witch has to pay her price for the service which she exacts from the evil spirit. She pays in human blood. It is commonly believed that at dead of night, when people are fast asleep, the witch undresses. This she does so that no one may recognize her by her dress, should anyone meet her on her errand. She goes to the *maria*, the hut where the *panda* keeps the image of his tutelary goddess, the *Marai mata*. There the witch promises the offering of human blood to the goddess. People believe that with the help of a spell a witch can change herself into a cat, a rat or a worm, and in this disguise enter the house of an enemy unseen and drink his blood. The victim does not feel any pain at the time, but in the morning when he wakes up, he may find



himself covered with blood and may realize that he had been visited by a witch. It also happens, they say, that a vampire drinks too much blood and afterwards vomits it outside on the veranda. The victim, for loss of blood, soon gets sick and dies after ten or twenty days. He can only be saved if a Panda cures him by powerful spells and prevents the witch from visiting him again.

But if no *panda* can be found to keep the witch at bay, the victim is visited again and again by the witch and drained of his blood. Eventually the victim dies. During the funeral ceremonies, the witch remains quiet and inactive. But as soon as the deceased has been buried or cremated, as the case may be, the witch becomes active again. It is believed that the body of a person who dies as a victim of witchcraft cannot be burned on the funeral pyre. The witch, therefore, goes at night to the cremation ground and removes the intact body from the heap of ashes. If her victim has been buried, she goes on the second or third day after burial to the cemetery, undresses there and walks naked three times around the grave of her victim. On her head she carries a brass plate with seven small pots, each containing either water, or oil, lamp-black, vermilion, or several dishes of food prepared specially for this purpose. A small light is also kept on the plate, and the witch herself carries a light in each hand.

After walking three times around the grave of her victim (or around the pyre, as the case may be) the witch places the plate with the various ingredients down on the ground and anoints herself with oil. Then, looking around, with great caution, in order to make sure that there is no intrusion, she digs the corpse out of the grave or pulls it out of the pyre. She washes the corpse from head to foot and with powerful spells tries to revive it. As soon as the corpse comes to life, she gives it something to eat and drink and begins to ask it questions. As long as the victim gives no reply, the witch has no power over it. But if it utters a single word, or cries and groans when she beats and tortures it, the witch cuts off its head and drinks its blood and fills a pot with the blood for her goddess. With great care, she returns the corpse

to the grave or funeral pyre, and proceeds to the shrine of *Marai mata*. There she vomits the blood which she has drunk and pours the blood, which she brought along in the pot, over the image of the goddess. Then she performs a dance in front of the goddess. Finally, she offers the blood of a young cock together with the blood of a crab and her own blood which she takes from her little finger. She prays during the offering that the goddess may give her a chance to make another kill and to drink the blood of another victim.<sup>5</sup>

Naturally, such stories about witchcraft and witches make people abnormally afraid and incite them to hate such imaginary fiends. These stories are also responsible for crimes perpetrated in the supposed punishment of witches. Black magic is called *pap* (sin); my informant, Panga, said that witchcraft was the greatest sin conceivable—it is *the* sin. In sheer self-defence, people eject such witches from their villages or kill persons whom they believe to be witches, thereby preventing in their opinion such pests from perpetrating more harm on the happiness and welfare of their kith and kin.

<sup>5</sup> The belief in the existence of vampires is widespread: it is however not only witches that drink the blood of human beings. The aborigines of eastern Mandla also believe in wer-tigers, called *olthwa*. Some years ago, a tiger was said to live in the jungle near the village of Duhania. People in the village were convinced that this tiger was not really a tiger, but a wer-tiger. He was a bad man who had died in his sins and consequently could not find peace in the other world. He harassed people by appearing as a tiger, wounding them and drinking their warm blood, but not killing them. A real tiger, my informants said, does not merely wound his victims, but kills them and then devours them. Some men even stated that they had seen the wer-tiger sitting on a tree—'no real tiger climbs trees'—with bangles on his legs and rings in his ear-lobes.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### GOND AND BHUMIA AT LEISURE

WHEN free from work, Gond and Bhumia beguile their leisure time at home in the circle of their families, chatting, smoking a pipe or doing some odd jobs around the house. Occasionally, they go and visit a neighbour, smoke and gossip until it is time to go to bed. In the evenings of bazaar days, on feast days or on fullmoon nights, people like to assemble for a singsong and a dance. However, the role of singing and dancing, in the life of the aborigines, should not be exaggerated. Their life is not all play and enjoyment. Even in places where the influence of modern civilization is less noticeable, the aborigines require a festive mood and an ample supply of alcoholic drinks before they take a day or a night off for singing and dancing.

Some anthropologists would have us believe that the life of the aborigines was in the past 'a life of song and laughter', and that the influx of civilization, and particularly of the Christian missionaries, has robbed them of their innocent enjoyments. That at some places Christian missionaries have, in misguided zeal, prohibited or at least discouraged singing and dancing may be true, especially if the songs and dances were of a lascivious character and led to excessive drinking. But more instances could be quoted to prove that it was precisely the missionaries who preserved the old folk-songs and dances and encouraged their converts to sing and dance, though of course within the bounds of moderation. At least in Mandla District, the Christian missionaries encourage singing and dancing, not only on feast days, but also on other occasions. In the Christian boarding schools, the pupils sing and dance almost daily in the evenings.

But there is no doubt that many social reformers in the aboriginal areas do exhibit a strongly Puritan strain, and are intolerant of the rather lascivious character of many songs

which the aborigines sing on such occasions; they disapprove still more of the mixing of men and women in group dances. It offends their sense of decency. Their feelings are outraged specially by the deep and heavy drinking which often accompanies such singing and dancing, and which often leads to worse excesses. Those aborigines who are anxious to please the reformers and conform to their standards of propriety readily give up singing and dancing. They, moreover, realize that it is just their manner of singing and dancing which makes them so conspicuously different from non-tribals. It is this rift between them and the non-tribals that they are so keen on denying or covering up wherever possible.

### 1. DANCING

Aboriginal singing and dancing are not restricted to one tribe or caste, though the Pardhan are the unchallenged masters of these arts in eastern Mandla. Though not nearly as good as the Pardhan, the Bhumia are considered to be superior, in dancing and singing, to all the other tribes of the district.

The authors of the tribal melodies and dance patterns are not known. These may be very old, each generation learning them from their forefathers. They are no doubt built on a musical system different from that of traditional non-tribal singing and dancing. This is proved also by the difficulty with which the aborigines of eastern Mandla learn and remember current Hindu tunes. They do not seem to like them at all.

The dance patterns current among the tribes of Gondwana vary according to the seasons and feasts of their calendar. The most popular dance in eastern Mandla is called the Karma dance. According to Dalton, this dance is very popular among the tribes of Bihar.<sup>1</sup> There the dance centres in the *Karma* tree (*Nauclea cordifolia*) which they plant on a certain day on the dancing ground.<sup>2</sup> The tribes of Gondwana dance the Karma from September till June, that is after the

<sup>1</sup> E. T. Dalton (1872): p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. Bhagvat (1957): Vol. 52, pp. 581-602.



monsoon till the beginning of the next monsoon or practically throughout the year. Among them, the dance is not in any way connected with any tree or with any social or religious feast. It is danced on every conceivable occasion.

The Karma dance is a group dance. Usually two groups face each other, men at one side, women at the other. The drummers stand between the two lines. One group starts singing, the other replies; one person leading, the others singing the refrain or repeating the line sung by the leader. The drummers turn each time to the group which is singing. The songs are often improvised on the spur of the moment, but not always. People with a good memory know a great number of these songs by heart and sing them at the Karma dance. Leaders in the singing are socially important people.

After a time of antiphonal singing, while the two rows of dancers are standing face to face and quite at ease, they get into the right mood. They grasp one another's hands or put their arms around the shoulders of their partners. Thus a compact row is formed which now advances and then retreats with a rhythmical bending of knees, while the opposite group rather nonchalantly looks on. But as soon as one group has retired to its original position, after singing a couplet and thus throwing its challenge at the opposite group, the latter takes up the refrain of the last verse and adds a new line, at the same time forming a similarly compact row and advancing and bending their knees according to the rhythm of the song. Each verse usually ends in a long-drawn vowel. Even while the singing of this long-drawn vowel is going on the first group begins another line, catching the right tune with unerring certainty.

Another variation of the Karma dance is the one in which one group of dancers slowly circles around the drummers, while the other group moves in a wider outer circle in the opposite direction.

According to my informant, Musra, the men did not move in former times when dancing the Karma dance; they just stood in a line and sang. The drummers took their position at one end of the two opposing rows. Only the group of women advanced and retreated in the dance, but their move-

ments were restricted to much side-stepping; they advanced only about two steps towards the men and never got near enough to be touched by them.

It is said that the subjects and the character of the Karma songs have also changed. At least the often rather suggestive and slightly lascivious type of songs was less apparent in the past. They, at least, say so now. But even today the dancers do not always sing of love, but of all the things which fill and move the mind of the aboriginal. The songs cover the whole range of tribal life, from birth to death, remarkable as well as most trivial events in life; they mock, scold, complain, praise and accuse, and give vent to all registers of feeling of which the aboriginal mind is capable.

The younger generation is especially fond of the Karma. Boys and girls naturally like to deck themselves out in their best clothes and all their ornaments. The women stick flowers into their hair and hold twigs in their hands. Sometimes they use wooden clappers (*tiski*) which they beat according to the rhythm of the dance. However, this *tiski* is more common among the Gond. In Chaurassi (a large Gond estate of 84 villages, hence the name Chaurassi) where the Gond predominate, the *tiski* is much used, while in regions where the Bhumia are stronger, the *tiski* is less common.

Another aboriginal dance is called the Rina. It is danced at Diwari and is a women's dance. The women form two rows facing each other. Bending low, they clap their hands to the rhythm of the song and step left-right, left-right in short steps. Each verse of the Rina song ends in a very high shrill note.

A similar dance for women is called Sua (parrot). In it the women move their feet, first turning them at the toes, then at the heels, sometimes bending double at the hips and then suddenly rising. They alternately clap their hands and raise them to their chests, singing all the while. The Sua and the Rina dances depict the movements of a parrot.

The Sela dance, on the other hand, is a dance for men. The dancing period of the Sela begins at Diwari when the Ahir dance it first. Then the other tribes follow suit. This dance comprises a number of different patterns, which allow



several variations. It begins with walking around in a circle; gradually the step of the dancers assumes a more vivacious rhythm and the singing also adopts a different and rather exciting air. In the end the men dance it by taking two steps forward and one backward. The Sela dance is a vigorous and sometimes rather wild dance with many varying patterns.

Popular also is the Danda Ras, a stick dance, which is known all over Central India. The dancers, holding short sticks in the right hands, move to the rhythm of the drum in two circles, one enclosing the other. Jumping in long steps alternately from the inner circle into the outer, and again back into the inner, the dancers beat their sticks against one another. The two circles move in opposite directions.

On certain feast days, as on Holi and Diwari, groups of dancers go from house to house, and sometimes even to other villages, to dance. On such occasions they often have to compete with rival groups from other villages. Each village wants to be superior in the beauty of its dance and in endurance. Once they are in the right mood, the aborigines think nothing of dancing through the whole night till late into the morning. After a short nap during the day, they are again ready for the dance through another night, to be interrupted only by an occasional glass of liquor.

A remarkable dance is perhaps the one which is performed by men and women at a wedding when the parties of the bride and groom meet before the village. This resembles a war dance in which all kinds of weapons are brandished and which often assumes a savage, violent character.

On such festive occasions as weddings and funeral feasts, masks are occasionally used to impersonate other people or animals; the tiger for example. The word for mask is *katphewa*. The men dress up for the role they want to act, paint their bodies according to the mask they want to display, dance around, make fun, and are given grain or coins by the spectators.

Others dress up, or rather undress, as religious mendicants (*sadhus*) and mockingly imitate the usual behaviour of these 'holy men' on their tours. It is also a very popular pastime to dress up as a 'Sahib' with a solar topee and shorts and to

imitate the habits of Europeans or Government officials.

At weddings they produce, with more imagination than skill, an 'elephant' and ride it through the holiday-minded crowd. On other occasions again they play 'snake' (*samp*). Two men or big boys stand side by side. Then a small boy steps before them, his back to the men. Now each man grasps a leg of the boy and, lifting the legs between the thighs, hold the boy in a horizontal position about two feet from the ground. Now another small boy jumps on the legs of the boy who is held by the two men. The weight of this small boy, at the back of the men, gives the boy who is held by the men the necessary balance to raise his trunk and arms from the ground. Throwing his body to the right and to the left and waving his arms around he gives a really striking picture of a snake. It is part of the game for the boy representing the snake to try and catch one of the other boys running around and teasing him.

### 3. STORY-TELLING

All the aboriginals of eastern Mandla love a story that is well told; story-telling is a much respected art among them. But it would be wrong to assume that every Gond and Bhumia is a treasure-mine of stories and folk-tales. As a matter of fact, there are only a few good story-tellers among them, and these with a seemingly inexhaustible store of tales. The majority of the aboriginals are more inclined to listen to a good story than to tell one. Still, it may be said that in almost every village there is a man or two who can reel out stories and tell them well. Among the various tribes of eastern Mandla, the Bhumia are credited with knowing the largest number of stories and to excel as expert story-tellers. The Pardhan, however, are better than the Bhumia; it is their profession, partly, to tell the origin and history of the various Gond and Bhumia clans and families. Certain folk-tales seem to be more or less the property of certain families, and are handed down from generation to generation.

Stories are rarely told before a big audience; more often



they are told to a more intimate circle. In the long nights, when the men sit out in their fields guarding their crops, somebody may start a story to while away the time and to keep himself and his companions awake. They are usually close relatives who share a watching hut, father and sons, or brothers and cousins; rarely if ever is there a servant.

Even then, stories are rarely if ever told without the stimulation of a drink. Imagination among them, does not seem to function without this stimulant and the tongue is loosened under the influence of alcohol only. My informant, Musra, said that his father was a famous story-teller. But he required a full bottle of liquor before he would start telling them. But once started, he was inexhaustible and could scarcely be persuaded to stop talking. Musra himself found it difficult to tell a story without the stimulant of alcohol. He brought sometimes a bottle along with him when he came to dictate a story. And whenever he felt his imagination flag or flounder, he helped himself with a few mouthfuls of the elixir to rejuvenate it.

Unlike other countries and people, the Gond and Bhumia women are blissfully ignorant of folk-tales. The reason seems to be that generally no stories are told in the presence of women. The gentle sex is not absolutely excluded from such entertainment; but it just happens that stories are related precisely on those occasions when women are absent. Religious myths are recited on the occasion of the solemn sacrifices when women are absent or relegated to the background, and folk-tales and fairy tales are told when the men and boys are away guarding the fields, or on occasions when, again, the women are kept at a distance. At public gatherings the men keep together as do the women. Though aboriginal society does not insist on the strict segregation of the sexes as is common among non-tribals, there exists a natural segregation which is a result of the different activities and interests of aboriginal men and women. Consequently, women and girls have less opportunity to listen to the recitation of myths and folk-tales than men and boys.

As to the stories current among the Gond and Bhumia, we may distinguish between myths concerning their gods, the

creation of the world, and the introduction of certain customs and social religious institutions. Some stories provide us with an explanation of the reason why a certain religious or social rite is performed, or show that a ceremony is just a re-acting, in the form of a mystery play, of a certain event, or the dramatic representation of a certain belief. Other stories are records of historical events. Imagination may have changed, added to or subtracted from, the historical truth, but at the basis of the story is some historical fact. Again, other tales are just products of playful fancy and poetic invention.

We cannot help asking where all these myths and tales actually came from, or by which way they reached the secluded jungles of eastern Mandla. A close analysis of the myths and folk-tales reveals the unmistakable fact that neither Gond nor Bhumia are their inventors. Too many of these stories contain elements which are foreign to their cultural environment. And many show a striking similarity to stories which we have already met with in ancient Sanskrit literature. This holds good especially for the religious myths which seem to be nothing else than local versions of ancient Hindu myths. Other stories seem to belong to a common reservoir of folk-tales which are told in certain variations, but with the same substance, from the west coast of India to the Himalayas. Naturally, as these popular tales are retold again and again by illiterate people, there exist many different versions, and no story-teller relates them in the same form. Only the substance remains the same.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### RESULTS OF CONTACT WITH MODERN CIVILIZATION

TO PASSING tourists, the life of the aborigines in eastern Mandla may appear beautiful and romantic: The country with its gurgling hill streams, its dense jungles abounding with game, the smiling fields basking in bright sunshine, the villages perched on steep declines, the well-swept village lanes and courtyards in front of the houses, the gardens at the back with fruit trees and vegetables, the chatter of the women walking early in the morning in single file to the village well, the carefree and exciting life of hunting and collecting of jungle produce; the strange ceremonies at birth, marriage and death, the picturesque rites on feast days and occasions of sacrifice, the tireless shuffling of dancing feet on full moon nights to the rhythm of drums, accompanied by the singing of quaint, but appealing melodies, interrupted occasionally by hoarse yells in the ecstasy of the dance; the narration of folk-tales and myths at night in the fields, to watchmen sitting around a warming fire, the impressive tribal art kept alive by the habit of adorning doors and walls with drawings and by the remodelling of dancing costumes—all these things make the life of the aborigines appear happy and exciting.

There is, however, a reverse to this bright picture: the poor condition of the soil on the steep hills, the danger of erosion through ever occurring torrential monsoon rains, the primitive and indifferent methods of cultivation, the back-breaking work during the agricultural season, the lack of working animals and adequate agricultural implements, the ravage of fields by birds and wild animals, the danger from snakes and beasts of prey, the severe restriction on hunting and collecting of jungle produce, the abject poverty and penury of aboriginal life, the near-starvation in many houses during times of unemployment or failure of crops, the exploitation through

usurers and government servants, the heavy drinking, the clash of tempers and lure of passions at dances, the loose morals and easy divorce, the suppression of individual enterprise and prevention of progress through over-conservative caste-elders, the draconic fines for breaches of meaningless caste laws, the frequency of death in childbirth, in infancy, the ravages of disease like malaria, epidemics like small-pox and cholera, venereal diseases, the superstition and abject fear of witchcraft and black magic, of the spirits of evil, disease and death, the absence of the higher forms of religion, the ignorance of higher values and privation of spiritual pleasures, the lack of education. Add to all this a general feeling of insecurity and loss of mental balance, the hurt pride and impotent anger when the aboriginal has to face the contempt, ridicule or oppression of the superior castes, and you obtain a more impartial picture of the true situation which today confronts the aborigines of eastern Mandla.

As long as the aborigines were left alone in their jungles, far from contact with more civilized peoples, their own religion, their social institutions and material culture were fairly adequate for the maintenance of their mental balance and physical vigour. But increasing contact with non-tribal cultivators and traders, both Hindu and Muslim, the infringement of new Government relations on their mode of life, have deeply disturbed their mental poise and endangered their physical well-being. Along with many other aboriginal tribes, Gond and Bhumia now have the instinctive feeling that their traditional outlook, their religion, and their social and material culture cannot stand up to that of the intruders. Their reaction to this state of things is mainly threefold:

A considerable minority—among them the Bhumia—accept the progressive destruction of their life and culture with a pathetic passivity. They feel themselves wronged and oppressed, but are quite unable to defend themselves. Their reaction is retreat. They cling to their happy past and retreat further and further before the advancing civilization into the more inaccessible regions of the country. There they attempt to preserve as long as possible their old traditional manner of living.



Others go under in the flood of advancing civilization. They turn into dregs of modern society and react to the danger of total extinction by a spiritless and cringing subjection. They become 'mean, cringing, cowardly and as great liars as any others.'<sup>1</sup> They become the underdogs of modern Hindu society, the untouchables, the depressed classes. They have lost all those essential invisible things that give people solidarity, contentment, self-respect. They have discarded the habits, so hard to restore, of a disciplined social life. What they have gained in exchange is the awareness of a superior way of living from which they are forever debarred, the desire for unobtainable material goods, and a bitter nostalgia for a lost world and a lost status.

Another group tries to adapt itself to the outward forms of the dominating culture and to keep pace with the new times by adopting the customs and usages of the more respectable strata of Hindu society. Among these we find many Gond. They try to observe strictly all the rules and regulations of Hindu social behaviour which they recognize as indispensable for the maintenance of a respectable social standard in Hindu society. But their primitive past, their poverty and ignorance are too heavy a burden on this struggle to maintain a respectable social position. Without co-operation from outside the effort may prove too difficult.

The present plight of the aborigines in general, and of the Gond and Bhumia in particular, is mainly due to the following factors:

### 1. LOSS OF LIVING SPACE

The Land Settlement of 1868 deprived many aboriginals of their landed property. By tradition and habit, these jungle tribes were accustomed to a frequent change of their habitations and of their fields. They practised shifting cultivation; when a plot of field was exhausted, they cleared another jungle plot. Living much on the produce of the forest, on roots, plants and fruits collected in the jungle, they never

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. C. A. Ward (1870): p. 123.

had their heart set on intensive cultivation. The forest was considered the common property of a tribal group and was divided into certain well-defined districts by tradition and usage. No written settlement was required since each group kept to its allotted area and did not trespass into the tracts of other groups.

Under the Gond Kings, this way of living was not much disturbed. It may occasionally have happened that a group was ousted from a particularly fertile area which was granted to non-tribal cultivators; but there was plenty of land for new fields so that no great hardship was suffered if a group was deprived of its land. If taxes were paid at all, they were claimed from the chieftains only. Later, the country must have been divided among a number of Gond chiefs, while the common folks and the other tribes, like the Bhumia, lived in close dependence on these landlords.

When the Marathas occupied the country, they abolished this old feudal system and increased the land tax. They controlled the country by village headmen (*patel*) who were their agents, leased the land to tenants, collected the revenue and exercised magisterial authority. Since, at that time, Gond and Bhumia were scarcely yet cultivators in the strict sense of the word, at least those living in the remote tracts of the district were not much affected by this change.

But then the British Government took Mandla District in hand. In 1868, a new land settlement was made. The Gond and Bhumia who had never regarded the field plots which they cultivated as their private property, but as the property of the whole tribal group to which they belonged, were dispossessed. In ignorance of the true situation it was decided that 'according to the custom of the country, the wandering tribesmen had no title to proprietary right or to occupancy right in the tracts over which they roamed'. By reason of this act of the British Government, the Bhumia as well as the more primitive Gond and the other jungle tribes were deprived of the ownership of the land which since time immemorial had been the corporate property of the tribal groups. At first the half-nomadic aborigines did not even realize the change. Land was free for the asking and taxes



had always to be paid. But with the influx of more and more non-tribal cultivators, the tribesmen soon found that from proprietors they had been degraded to tenants, or worse still, to landless and homeless jungle-dwellers. The landlords and Government agents now had the right to drive them from the fields which they so indifferently tilled and to invite in their place land-hungry non-tribal cultivators who gladly and regularly paid the taxes, and once installed could never be ousted. And these cultivators brought a disturbing and over-powering tune into the leisurely rhythm of the jungle-dwellers.

The infiltration of land-hungry non-tribal cultivators, both Hindu and Muslim, still continues. The aborigines are still dispossessed of their fields. Even those who had wrested new fields from the jungle after the first dispossession in 1868 are affected. In the past the usual procedure was this: A poor aboriginal who has lost his bullocks gives his field in *adhya* (rent of half of the harvest) to a wealthy cultivator who has the bullocks to plough it. It may take years for the owner of the field to collect sufficient funds to buy a new pair of bullocks. But then the man who rented the field refuses to give it up. He has cultivated the field for so long, ploughed it and cleared it of weeds and bush; now he wants the fruit of his labour. The owner can, of course, go to court. But he knows it will not lead anywhere; nor has he the money to employ a pleader. The wealthy man continues to cultivate the field. After some years his opportunity comes. He gives the land surveyor a bribe, and the field is written over in his name. This was the usual procedure in the former *ryotwari* areas.

In the *malguzari* areas, where the landowners have full proprietary rights, the procedure is slightly different. It is the merry hunting ground of the moneylenders. Before the Land Settlement of 1868, no cultivator could be deprived of his fields for ordinary debts. There were no courts which would have transferred the land owned by the debtor to his creditor. It was against general Indian usage. But with the application of the English law of contract and transfer of property, the moneylenders have been able since 1868 to

take the land of cultivators who were unable to pay their debts. And in fact, many of them acquired large estates which, however, they did not cultivate themselves, but again rented out to the former owners, reducing them to mere chattels. While a Gond landlord treats his tenants humanely, in accordance with time-honoured traditions, the agents of a moneylender grind their tenants to beggary and, while relentlessly pressing the landlord's claims, they in addition fill their own pockets with money extorted from the ignorant and helpless tenants by deceit or intimidation.

Another reason for complaint is that in proportion to the yield of their fields the aboriginal cultivators have to pay a land tax which is excessive. They have to pay almost the same taxes as the non-tribal farmers of the plains who, owing to their superior methods of cultivation, get a much higher yield. It is true that the aboriginals only need to adopt the farming methods of the non-tribal agriculturists to obtain the same results, provided the soil is of the same quality; but it is just one of the handicaps resulting from their primitive past that at present they are unable to do so. During the present difficult period of adjustment and transition, Government should exempt them from heavy taxation, and in addition give them some special training in superior farming methods.

## 2. ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION

Another curse which threatens the aborigines and, in fact, has already broken many, is the ruthless economic exploitation by various agencies which they have to suffer. One exploiter is the moneylender. The aboriginals, by their very nature and economy, want to lead an independent economic life. They want to produce as far as possible what they require for their livelihood. But the yield of their fields is just sufficient to stave off starvation. No surplus is left for extra expenses. While the cash expenses for the purchase of clothes, for the payment of taxes and other requirements are included in their ordinary budget, no provision can be made for expenses incurred through sickness, marriage or



death. The payment of a heavy fine for an offence against the caste laws throws the economic balance of a family entirely out of gear. And if crops fail—which at times happens—they must either starve or ask for a loan. This is the time for the moneylender.

There are moneylenders who are willing to lend money to the aboriginals, even to the Bhumia. For among the aborigines the Bhumia are known as bad debtors. They rarely pay back in time. And it is useless for the creditor to go to court. There is little in their house worth seizing. Moneylenders who have been repeatedly deceived by Bhumia debtors swear that they will never again lend money to Bhumia. The usual creditors of the Bhumia are Gond, not non-tribal moneylenders. The Gond are generally wealthier than the Bhumia and often give small loans to people of their own village. They have a better chance of getting their money back.

The usual moneylenders for the Gond—and only to some extent for the Bhumia also—are the Labhana (Banjara) who carry grain on pack bullocks from the local markets (bazaar). After the sale of their grain they buy other goods which on their return they sell to the aborigines either for cash or for grain. From these Labhana, the aborigines borrow money when they are in need.

The common rate of interest per year is twenty-five per cent, payable after the harvest, regardless of whether the loan was taken twelve months or only four months before the end of the term. In case of urgency or greater risk, an even higher rate of interest may be demanded.

Loans may not always be required for extraordinary expenses, but the loan of foodgrain (*khawa*) and seed-grain (*bijai*) is a problem which recurs yearly. Many aboriginal cultivators find themselves short of seed-grain of one or the other kind almost every year, either due to a partial failure of the crop, to unforeseen expenses or to sheer improvidence. Often enough their store of foodgrain is also exhausted long before the next harvest. Thus they are forced to borrow grain from wealthier fellow villagers or from professional moneylenders. At harvest time, the grain must be returned

with fifty per cent interest. If the harvest proves a failure, repayment may be deferred for another year, but with a compound interest of fifty per cent. The risk involved by such a deferment is no doubt responsible for the high rate of interest. Another reason is that the market-price for grain is usually twenty-five per cent higher at the time of sowing (when grain is borrowed) than at harvest time (when the borrowed grain is returned). Moreover, the lender had the expense of storing his stock of grain since the last harvest. Much grain is also destroyed by rats and other vermin, or is lost through other adverse circumstances. If the rate of interest were lower than fifty per cent, the lender would scarcely make much profit.

Nowadays, however, when creditors give a loan of grain, they compute the value of the grain in money and afterwards, in the harvest season, demand repayment at the current rate, plus twenty-five per cent interest. If a creditor, instead of selling the grain which he receives from his debtor, again lends it out after half a year at this rate of interest, his profit is indeed considerable, though a considerable proportion must be written off for bad debts. But in general, this computation of the grain debt into cash debt—a result no doubt of the modern banking system—has turned to the great disadvantage of the debtor. The borrower now has to sell his grain at once after the harvest when the price is low, while he took the loan when the price of grain was at its highest. The rates of interest for cash loans into which the grain loans have been converted are thus disproportionately high though they are reduced by twenty-five per cent. No wonder that more and more land passes into the hands of the moneylenders. Luckily, up to the present time the moneylender's greed for land was checked by the difficulty of getting field labourers for the cultivation of the land wrested from its former owners. With the introduction of modern agricultural machinery, this difficulty will soon be surmounted.

It would be easy to quote a great number of cases of the grossest exploitation by moneylenders. Instances abound of extortions of many times the amount of money borrowed from a usurious moneylender. But we may still maintain that as



a rule moneylenders exact no more than the interest due to them. When the borrower takes the loan, he knows the rate of interest he has to pay. If he takes the loan in spite of the harsh conditions attached, he must face the consequences.

Instead of quoting any instances of exploitation which came to my notice, I want to note down another case which shows how involved such money transactions sometimes become: A Bhumia of Duhania borrowed some years ago a *khandi* (100 seer) of grain at fifty per cent interest. He had to give a cow in pawn. Unable or unwilling to repay his debt, he saw his debt increase in four years' time to three times the amount of grain which he had borrowed. When the lender at last lost his patience and insisted on repayment of the loan, the matter was brought before the village council (*panch*). The debtor declared his willingness to pay for the grain borrowed, but demanded the return of the cow given in security. This cow had meanwhile given two calves which the debtor also claimed. The creditor, on the other hand, was ready to return the cow, but not the calves. After a long discussion the village council decided that the creditor had to return the calves also. The debtor sold the bigger calf and with the amount realized from the sale repaid his debt with the accumulated compound interest.

Another way of securing a loan is by giving a field in pawn to the moneylender, or by letting the moneylender cultivate the field in payment of the interest for the loan. If the amount borrowed is rather high, the debtor may have to leave the field for a long time with the creditor. The latter usually does not cultivate the field himself, but rents it out to someone else.

Debts are often worked off. Repayment of a debt through work makes a debtor particularly vulnerable to exploitation. In one case, for instance, a Bhumia wanted twenty rupees for his marriage. The landlord lent him the money on the condition that the Bhumia would work for him for five years. He was to get only his daily food and a loincloth once a year. During these five years, the Bhumia's wife had to support herself and the five children which she bore him. After five years, the woman got tired of her husband and left him. The

Bhumia had to marry again to have some one to look after his children. He entered into another contract with his landlord to work for him for another five years, because he again needed twenty rupees to cover the wedding expenses. When the second five years had passed, the Bhumia thought that his debt had also been worked off. But the landlord said that the Bhumia had only worked for the interest and that he had still to repay forty rupees.

Another Bhumia took a loan of twenty rupees from an Ahir village headman. He worked seven years as his ploughman. For the last five years he paid every year ten to twelve rupees. He does not even know the exact amount he repaid. But the Ahir insists that the Bhumia has still four rupees to repay though all these years he never received any other loans from the headman. The Bhumia now refuses to pay any more.

This same Ahir lent twenty rupees to a young Bhumia boy many years ago. The Bhumia needed the money to pay for his bride. It was agreed that the boy would serve as a field servant (*barsi*) for four years in repayment of his debt. His employer would only give him his daily food. The Bhumia served five years. In the third year of his service, his wife ran away. In order to pay for another wife, the Bhumia took another loan from the Ahir: two rupees cash and a young buffalo. Witnesses valued the animal at nine rupees, but the Ahir made the Bhumia sign a receipt for thirty rupees, two rupees in cash and twenty-eight rupees for the buffalo.

After the Bhumia had served for six years, he got tired and ran away, taking his wife and children along. But the Ahir forced him to return and to serve him again. He, however, promised to deduct twelve rupees every year from the debt. The Bhumia worked for another three years, for food only and one rupee per year. His wife had to support herself and the children, and even to clothe her husband, by working as a daily labourer. For some time she also cleaned the stable for the Ahir, for which work she was paid two rupees per year. After three years, the Bhumia again ran away with his wife and children. He returned, however, a month later to fetch his belongings. The Ahir caught him and forced him



to sign a promissory note for forty rupees, the whole amount of his debt plus ten rupees.

The Ahir is head of a joint family of four brothers. They are rich, have over a hundred head of cattle and employ six servants. They enrich themselves at the expense of the other villagers who are all mortally afraid of them. They somehow get all the best fields into their possession which they cultivate with farm servants.

Similar instances could be quoted in great number.<sup>2</sup> These few, however, will be sufficient.

Moneylenders have devised various tricks by which to get their money back. They may, for instance, allow their debtors to cultivate their own fields. But soon after the harvest they appear and seize as much of the debtor's crop as is their due. Often it is the greater portion of the crop; consequently the debtor is again forced to borrow money and grain. Were he to take the loan at once when the market price for grain is still low, he would not fare so badly, but usually he defers borrowing as long as possible and then has to pay a considerably higher price for the grain.

Gond and Bhumia with no fields of their own or with insufficient land may rent a plot for fifty per cent of the yield. This system is called *adhya* or *batai*. When the crop has been cut, it is divided into two equal portions; one portion goes to the owner of the field, the other remains with the tenant. If the harvest is good the tenant often pays so much in rent that it amounts to the price of the whole field.

It is clear that the financial position of the Gond and Bhumia cannot improve as long as conditions of this kind prevail. The Government has made some attempts to ease the situation by giving loans at reduced rates of interest.\* But the aboriginal farmers are reluctant to avail themselves of these loans (*taccavi*), as they get only small sums; they have to go for them often to distant headquarters and wait there a long time. Moreover they must pay tips to several persons before their application is accepted. In the end, it actually costs

<sup>2</sup> W. V. Grigson relates a great number of such instances in his book: *The Aboriginal Problem in the Central Provinces and Berar*. Nagpur, 1944. Cf. Index, p. IV, Exploitation.

less to borrow from the moneylender. And again, if they fail to repay the Government loan, the Government may seize their bullocks and other property which moneylenders cannot so easily do.

While it is impossible to state how far the aborigines are right in their complaints that many lower officials of the Revenue, Police, Excise and Forest Departments are adepts in extortion and blackmail, too many cases are known to make us disbelieve that there is much truth in these allegations.

Forest guards, it is said, cause much trouble and annoyance. There is a tax on cattle grazing in the forest; about ten years ago, it was fixed at six annas per bullock, eight annas per cow, and a rupee per buffalo. Though this tax is not high, it is resented by the aborigines because in former times they had not to pay any tax for grazing their animals in the forest. If any animal is caught by the forest guards in the jungle, either because it has strayed there by accident or because it has deliberately been led there, the owners are fined. Sometimes, it is alleged, the forest guard himself leads the cattle into the jungle and then seizes the animals to extort money from the owners.

Others, it is alleged, enter the houses and inspect the roof beams. Surreptitiously they make an imprint of their official wood stamp on the beam with the date of the current year and then charge the owner of the house with having stolen the beam. The aborigines never keep the receipts after having purchased their beams, or sometimes are not even given receipts. Accused of having stolen the beam, they cannot prove the contrary and are fined or have to pay 'hush money' to the forest guard. A Bhumia near Bijora is said to have been fined twice in this manner for stealing the roof beams of his house which he had bought long ago. First he was fined Rs. 2.50 only; the second time eight rupees.

At one place, a forest guard confiscated 24 pounds of honey which four Bhumia and two Agaria had collected in the Government forest. The guard threatened the men with jail and a high fine, and finally demanded fifty rupees for not reporting the case. After much bargaining, the men agreed to pay fifteen rupees and hand over the money to the guard.



The same forest guard is said to have taken many other and even higher bribes in several villages of his beat (*naka*). He is often seen in the company of a Pardhan who spies for him and gets a certain percentage of the spoil.

Another forest guard took eighty rupees from the villagers of a certain place near Dindori because their cattle had inadvertently crossed the boundary of the jungle area.

In one case of bribery, when a report was made to the forest officer, the guilty forest guard was transferred, but the aboriginal who paid the bribe and only afterwards reported the matter, was fined four rupees for giving a bribe of ten rupees.

In another case, a poor man from a village near Jamgaon was fined five rupees for removing some green wood no thicker than his wrist. The fine amounted to more than the man could earn in a month in that area.

Not only forest guards, but land surveyors (*patwari*) and police constables are said to extort from the aborigines quite shamelessly. The land surveyors generally take tips for every little service which they do in the normal execution of their duties. When the receipts for the payment of the land-tax are given, each cultivator has to pay at least eight annas to the *patwari*. When the crops are examined, the *patwari* expects a tip, as also when a field is transferred to another name.

The aborigines are often heavily fined for offences against the excise laws. A Gond was fined sixty rupees because he was found in the possession of a bottle of liquor. He had to sell his bullocks and to work for two years as a servant in order to pay his fine. Another Gond was fined seventy rupees because in a bottle which he carried a few drops of liquor were found. Other aborigines were fined from forty rupees to eighty rupees for a bottle of illicitly distilled liquor. One man was fined four rupees only, but the excise officer had given him a kick with his boot, for which the man was fined by his caste council.

Naturally, the policemen have the best opportunity for exploitation. At a certain police station near the border of the former Rewa State, the police constables are said to be par-

ticularly troublesome. Almost every farmer of the villages in the district has already been blackmailed. If a report is made, and investigations carried out, the witnesses are intimidated and forced to take back their incriminating statements. Or witnesses are asked to pick out the culprits from a group of seventy and odd constables lined up. This is often impossible three or four months later when at last the case is taken up. It is alleged that constables who arrive with a small box at the station leave it after a few years with several big ones. One constable required ten men to carry his luggage when he left the place.

To illustrate the manner in which the aboriginals of eastern Mandla are said to be harrassed let me quote the following cases. Though my informants appeared to be trustworthy, I cannot vouch for the truth of their statements as I could not confirm the details by my own investigations.

A Gond of the former Rewa State wanted to bring some grain to his son who was living in Mandla District. He was ignorant of the fact that a recently introduced law forbade the export of grain from Rewa. Caught by the police, the man was made to stand the whole night at the police station until he promised to pay a hundred rupees. Being a wealthy man, with gold rings in his ears, he pawned these and other jewels in the village and obtained a loan of a hundred rupees. He paid the money to the police and was released.

In another village, a Gond died of snake-bite. His father-in-law made a report to the police. The police officer accused him straightaway of murder and arrested him. He demanded Rs. 700 for his release. On the way to the police station, he promised to squash the case if the prisoner paid Rs. 600. The man refused. The police officer reduced his demand gradually to Rs. 400. In the end the prisoner agreed to pay that sum for his release. He had to sell a field, his bullocks and all the jewels of his womenfolk in order to pay the amount.

Another man inherited some money and a field from a relative. Other persons who thought they had a claim to the property reported the matter to the police. The head constable came and demanded Rs. 600 from the heir on the



spot. The man had to sell his best fields and to pawn his jewels in order to be released. Or else a case would have been trumped up to have him put in jail.

### 3. LOSS OF THEIR TRADITIONAL FOREST PRIVILEGES

Gond and Bhumia have never been purely agricultural tribes. While living in or near the jungle, they have always been accustomed to complement their diet with jungle fruits and roots, and to make free use of what the forest offered them. This freedom of the forest is now greatly restricted by Government laws. They are no more free to hunt in the forest. If they are caught poaching, the punishment is severe. If they cut a tree without license, they are often heavily fined. The forest produce, fruits, flowers, gum, bamboo shoots, etc. may not be collected for private use or sale; they are the property of the contractor who bought them at an auction from the Forest Department. The aborigines, whose ancient rights to the forest and its produce are thus severely restricted, cannot easily get used to this change and violate these new regulations in a kind of righteous resentment. They feel instinctively that they must supplement their poor diet with the produce of the forest as they were used to in the past. If they are strictly forced to depend on what their poor fields yield, their health would certainly suffer. Since they are prohibited from collecting jungle produce for sale, they are deprived of the necessary cash for the purchase of such articles which they do not produce themselves. The new restrictions have, therefore, thrown their whole economic life out of gear.

The only solution to the problem of their economic improvement would be to make better farmers out of them. But they ought to be taught, must be guided and helped or they will never recover their economic equilibrium. After all, it is a fundamental and radical change of their whole economic life that is demanded from them. The Gond and Bhumia are by nature and instinct, tradition and custom, averse to the dull and plodding regularity of a cultivator's life. From their forefathers they have inherited the restless blood of hunters

and food-gatherers. Field cultivation was an improvement, but always a subsidiary occupation. Now these tribes are forced to accept it as their only occupation.

Government officials and social reformers often consider the revival of the tribal industries as the solution of the economic problem of the Central Indian aborigines. In former times, the primitives produced almost everything that they required and bought but little from outsiders. Now they need at least some cloth to clothe themselves, and so many other articles which cost money. They could learn to produce them: weaving and spinning, leather-work, iron-work, carpentry, etc. could be learned. But the result of learning a trade would be the loss of the highly-respected status of a farmer. In non-tribal society an artisan is a step lower than a farmer. And spinners and weavers, basket-makers, leather-workers, etc. are even treated as untouchable outcasts. As long as this prejudice against certain trades exists, the aborigines should not be encouraged to take up such crafts. For the aborigines are so keen on obtaining a respectful place in non-tribal society that they will rather starve than take up a job that degrades them in the eyes of the non-tribals.

It is frequently deplored that aborigines who come into contact with modern civilization soon cast off their picturesque and often artistic dress and ornaments and exchange them for the cheap, gaudy, mass-produced articles of the factories. Often enough missionaries and social reformers are blamed for this change of dress and the decline of art in tribal life. But the real reason for this change is quite another. First of all, the sensitive aborigines fear the derision of the superior castes. Though their own dress and ornaments may be beautiful and artistic, the material of which they are made is cheap: grass, beads, wood, stone and cheap metal; or the workmanship is crude and primitive. The aborigines sacrifice true art to the superior workmanship of non-tribal artisans and to the higher value of their material. A further reason for the adoption of non-tribal dress and ways of living is that the aborigines do not want to be marked out as 'primitive' and 'different'. They do not want to be treated with a kind of patronising condescension. It hurts their self-respect to



be told time and again that they must be 'up-lifted', that they belong to the inferior and backward classes. For the same reason, they give up their singing and dancing so often. Non-tribal Hindu society disapproves of it, and it sets them apart as 'primitive'.

It is to be hoped that the aboriginal love for beautiful decoration and the ability to create products of true art may not be lost entirely in this period of adjustment. Tribal art will probably revive as soon as the aboriginals have found their mental balance and have secured for themselves the wealth and prosperity which is indispensable for the cultivation of true art.

#### 4. LOSS OF VITALITY

In the past, the Gond and Bhumia, in the jungles and hills of eastern Mandla, led a varied and exciting life. For a few months of the year they did hard work, hacking down the forest and sowing their seeds into the virgin soil fertilized by the ashes of the trees. But at other times they were free to hunt in the jungle, to shoot and ensnare birds, catch fish, and collect the fruits of the jungle. From the *mahua* flowers they made their strong drink, *daru*.

Things became different when the Government began to assume control even of the remotest jungle tracts, when it imposed its laws and exacted its taxes from the wildest and shyest forest-dwellers. At the same time, the wild hill-tribes began to get in touch with civilization and acquired the taste for certain luxuries; things desirable, though not indispensable, like clothes of mill-woven fabrics, ornaments, tobacco, articles for which they had to pay in hard cash. A life above their economic status, however low, together with the serious disturbances of their economic and social principles, dissatisfaction with their traditional religion, and other factors are responsible for reducing the aboriginals to a state that borders on despair or dull resignation to the inevitable. It appears that the mental stamina of the aboriginals is inadequate for their present tasks which the hard competition with superior cultures and peoples forces upon them.

Primitives, like other people, strive for a life worth living. They are not content with an existence reduced to the elementary satisfactions of the urge of hunger and sex, and to mere preservation from pain and disease. They also want a share in the amenities of life which in the past they did not miss because they were ignorant of their existence, but of which they now feel themselves unjustly deprived. In their present state of economic insecurity and social and religious instability, they gradually lose those spontaneous natural reactions that were their characteristic and their privilege in the days of their simplicity. The age of youth and romance passes all too quickly; it is all too soon cut short by disease and old age. What remains is a losing struggle against starvation, disease and social degradation. No wonder that in general the aboriginal birth-rate is lower than that of the non-tribal castes.

### 5. THE INROADS OF NEW DISEASES

Periodic epidemics of small-pox, cholera and plague might, from times immemorial, have ravaged the jungle tracts of eastern Mandla. Malaria, dysentery and other diseases might always have been rampant there. This certainly explains why the number of the jungle-dwellers remained stationary for so long. But closer contact with modern civilization has exposed the aborigines of eastern Mandla to even more imminent danger of extinction from new diseases which always follow in the train of modern civilization. Among these are the very dangerous tuberculosis, influenza and venereal diseases. Their power of resistance against these diseases, which for more civilized peoples are no longer so virulent is not yet sufficiently developed. The consequence is that these newly-introduced diseases play havoc among the aboriginal population.

There is some hope that after a certain period of acclimatization the tribesmen will get more inured to these new destructive diseases. In this regard, the Gond are in a better position than the Bhumia. The latter are not much over 50,000 in number, while the Gond are sixty times as numerous



and live in fairly compact groups. There is some danger, in the face of a decline of the Bhumia population, that they might be wiped out before they have a chance to build up their resistance. For, the final recovery of a people from the corrosive influence of a new civilization depends not only on its recuperative power, but also on the density of population at the time when it is attacked.<sup>3</sup> The Gond, therefore, need not fear total extinction; in fact, they appear to have already passed the crisis successfully and are now slightly increasing in numbers.

While the situation of the Gond and Bhumia is certainly very difficult, it is not hopeless. A recovery is not impossible. The chances are definitely less bright for the Bhumia. They are, after all, a small tribal group. They also cling more stubbornly to their old traditions and ways of life than the Gond. They are more passive and less enterprising. But it seems that the Bhumia have already survived the inroads of stronger civilizations: once when they were dominated by Aryan invaders from whom, as is evident from their myths and folk-tales, they adopted their language and many other customs and beliefs; and later, when they had to adapt themselves to the Gond immigrants to their habitat. The Bhumia did not perish though these changes were forced upon them by superior cultures and stronger peoples.

They, as well as the Gond, will also survive the assimilating power of non-tribal culture. This process of assimilation and amalgamation is proceeding rapidly at present: The Gond are drawn into non-tribal society, and all spheres of their social, religious and economic life are deeply affected by this process. The Bhumia have so far been able to keep aloof to some extent. But if they are not yet totally immersed in this current, the waters have reached them, too, and they will not escape. They will soon be swimming along with the rest of the aboriginal tribes towards a synthesis of all Indian cultures, religions and races. Of course, this process of amalgamation is complicated by the fact that Hinduism itself is in a critical stage of transformation. Many, admittedly un-

3 Cf. J. H. N. Evans (1922): pp. 29 ff.

essential, features of Hinduism are gradually being discarded; but this process has not yet reached the remote jungles of eastern Mandla.

Modern civilization has only just touched eastern Mandla. The aboriginals have seen it passing in the form of buses and cars; it made itself felt in the guise of British rule, by the tightening of Governmental control and particularly by the restriction of *bewar* cultivation. It has, here and there, cured or saved them from disease by vaccination and inoculation; it has given a few of them some school education; but it has not yet seriously affected their outlook and their whole way of living. However, it is inevitable that the remote tracts of eastern Mandla will also be opened up to the inroads of that new national Indian culture which is in the making.



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